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## **PROJECT MANAGERS – DO THEY NEED TO BE CERTIFIED?**

*The purpose of this study is to examine the drivers behind the certification of project managers in Irish organizations, to identify the benefits and drawbacks of project management certification and to determine whether it is really necessary for project managers to be certified. Five organisations in Ireland participated in the study and one project manager from each organisation was interviewed. The size of the organisations, the level of experience of the project managers interviewed and the certification programmes completed varied. Differences as well as similarities across the organisations were identified. The results of the study put forward that the selection of an appropriate certification programme can depend on factors such as the availability of certification providers for training and support; the ease with which the certification programme can be adapted to suit the business; and the requirement to renew certification. While the findings show that project management certification does have several benefits these benefits do not require certification and could be realised by simply having good project management practices in place.*

**Keywords:** project management, certification, PRINCE2, PMBoK, PMI

# **PROJECT MANAGERS – DO THEY NEED TO BE CERTIFIED?**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of project-based work, which has been instigated by factors such as developments in information technology, changes in environmental regulations, increasing customer involvement, increased productivity, the drive towards shorter product life cycles and the complexity of inter-organisational relationships (Bredillet, 2005, Hartman and Ashrafi, 2002). This has led to the expansion of projects and project management beyond the traditional areas of construction and engineering and, as a result, is providing new challenges to the discipline of project management as well as organisations and individuals (Bredillet, 2005).

The growth in project management has come about more through necessity than through desire (Kerzner, 2006, p36). To date, the failure rate of Information Systems (IS) projects is very high, with the ineffective monitoring of tasks and risks, user resistance, project politics, lack of communication and the ineffective management of changes and inadequate hand-over procedures contributing to failure (Mahaney and Lederer, 2003, Winklhofer, 2002). These IS project failures can have serious consequences for the competitiveness and survival of an organisation (Winklhofer, 2002), particularly as organisations are now using IS projects for competitive advantage (Brancheaum and Wetherbe, 1987). However, according to Yetton et al. (2000) project performance can be improved by project managers meeting their responsibilities within an organisation that supports professional project management practice.

Although a simple definition of project management is not possible, Atkinson (1999) states that project management is a combination of management, planning and the management of change while Abbasi and Al-Mharmah (2000) state that project management is the art and science of planning, designing and managing work throughout all phases of the project's life cycle and attempting to achieve planned objectives within specific time and cost limits, through the optimum use of resources, using an integrated planning and control system. The Project Management Institute (PMI, 2005) defines project management as the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to a broad range of activities in order to meet the requirements of a particular project.

## **2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS**

The growth of project management in organisations has come about since the 1960's when organisations began searching for new management techniques and organisational structures that could support a changing environment (Kerzner, 2001, p48). The traditional, functionally structured organisation did not permit the cross-functional cooperation essential to successful project performance (Payne, 1993). Project management was often ad-hoc, with informal and temporary policies and procedures established for particular projects (Milosevic, 1996).

Project managers were challenged to keep their projects focused and, at the same time support their organisations need to adapt to changes and uncertainty in the business environment (Olsson, 2006). By the 1970's and early 1980's more and more organisations restructured to formalise the project management process and moved from an informal project management approach to a more structured approach (Kerzner, 2001, p49). By the 1990's the implementation of project management was recognised by management as a necessity, as companies recognised that they must compete on a basis of quality as well as cost (Kerzner, 2001, p67, Frame, 2002, p8). Rapid change became common with project targets constantly moving, leading to greater complexity and to the implementation of standard methods and procedures to manage this complexity (Frame, 2002, p33).

### **Difficulties facing project managers**

Project managers are critical to the successful development and implementation of information systems and information technology projects (Parker and Skitmore, 2005, Wateridge, 1997). However, project managers face many difficulties when managing software projects. These difficulties relate to poorly defined goals and specifications, lack of a project plan, unrealistic deadlines and budgets, and lack of user involvement (Jurison, 1999, Wateridge, 1997). In addition, a project may not have a sound basis or tasks may be inadequately defined (Kerzner, 2001, p1056). It is not uncommon for users to be unsure of their needs and frequently change requirements midway through the project and, as a result, software projects frequently fall short of what was required (Jurison, 1999). In addition, some project managers may not have the commitment and support of senior management resulting in inadequate resources to complete the project or difficulty dealing with any political issues that may arise in projects (Schwalbe, 2006, p51, Pitagorsky, 1998, Kerzner, 2001, p56).

Another issue project managers' face is that they often find themselves in the role with little or no formal training (Carbone and Gholston, 2004, Pressman, 1998). Even though organisations are increasingly aware of the value of project management, and of the training and development required to deliver that value (Bernstein, 2000, Pappas, 2005), it is rare for project managers to have formal training (Sauer et al., 2001). Project managers are rarely selected because they have been developed for the role. Project managers may be promoted on the basis of their technical skills, but they often lack the necessary team management skills (Nellore and Balachandra, 2001). This can leave them ill-prepared to take on the responsibility of managing a project and a team (Pressman, 1998). Carbone and Gholston (2004) state that while organisations should invest in developing the skills of their project managers, few organisations offer project management training programmes and even fewer are requiring an internal or external project management certification, which is of concern to the authors as organisations are not seeing the benefit of having a focused and comprehensive approach to training.

It is essential to the development of project management as a profession, to provide training programmes where project managers can acquire theoretical knowledge of the subject to supplement their hands-on experience (Turner and Huemann, 2000). Wateridge (1997) believes that the skills required for project management take a long time to develop through experiential learning, and that project management training is required to accelerate the learning process. If organisations commit to educating and training project managers, the knowledge gained will improve their performance and skills, resulting in additional benefits

through the better management of projects, and an increased chance of project success (Wateridge, 1997, Turner and Huemann, 2000, McCreery, 2003).

### **3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION**

Recognition of the power of project management has resulted in many training organisations offering courses in this field, varying from in-house training to external courses to internationally recognised certification programmes (Loo, 1996). Certification is a way of improving a discipline by promoting the practical implementation of standards, the awareness of a body of knowledge, the recognition of a code of ethics, and the need for professional development (Tripp, 2002, Pierson et al., 2001). A certification programme will draw from each of these areas to establish a comprehensive competency benchmark for the profession that identifies and establishes standard practice (Tripp, 2002). As businesses become increasingly global there is a growing need to accredit professional certification of individuals on an international basis (Adams et al., 2004).

For an individual, one of the most significant ways to gain respect in one's career is to seek and achieve certification as an accredited professional. This is viewed by the public as evidence of skill and knowledge within a field of professional practice (Adams et al., 2004, Schwalbe, 2006, p29). To become certified in a profession, an individual must fulfill a set of requirements or satisfy a set of standards that are based on the expectations of performance within that profession. Each individual should then work to continually improve his/her professional practice through ongoing self education and performance on the job (Adams et al., 2004). However, more needs to be done to improve project management education as the development of project management competence is a life-long process that is acquired from both formal education and continuous practice (Turner and Huemann, 2000). It is important for project managers to continue their training to keep up to date with advances in the profession as “project skills don’t stop with certification” (Pappas, 2005). Up until now, formal education in project management has essentially been post-experience (Turner and Huemann, 2000).

#### **Project management certification organisations**

There are an increasingly large number of organisations engaged in corporate project management training (Ward, 1999, Sawaya and Trapanese, 2004), which is also reflected in the increase in membership of project management organisations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), International Project Management Association (IPMA), various Projects IN Controlled Environment (PRINCE2) accredited organisations in the UK and the Institute of Project Management in Ireland (Ward, 1999, Pappas, 2005, Mantel et al., 2001, p36). This growth in training providers has both positive and negative implications (Ward, 1999). The positive include the following:

- The project management discipline is beginning to be recognised as a profession.
- More training means a better educated workforce.
- More training is available, accessible and at competitive prices.

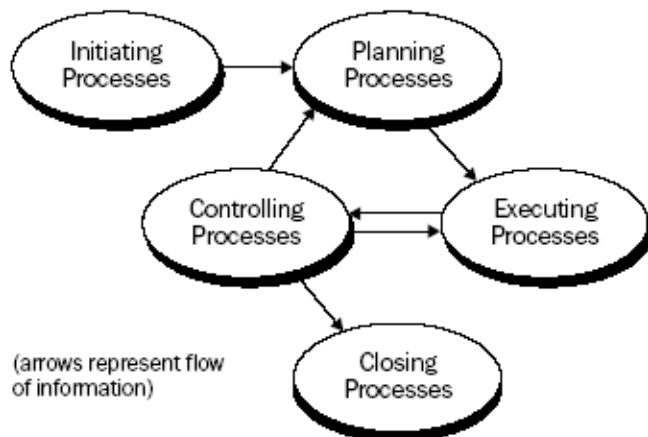
On the negative side:

- How can we be certain that the content and quality of the course is of a certain standard?

In 1995, the IPMA committed itself to establishing a programme for the qualification and certification of project management professionals and the establishment of organisations that would provide the accreditation programmes required (Turner, 1996). The aim of the programme was to make project management a global profession. Turner (1996) stated that to achieve this it was necessary to establish:

- An internationally accepted Body of Knowledge.
- Internationally accepted competency standards, against which to measure the performance of project managers and project management professionals.
- An internationally accepted structure for the career progression of project managers and project management professionals.
- Internationally accepted accreditation bodies to accredit national and international qualifying and certifying bodies.

Outside of the accredited project management organisations, that uphold certain standards, there are certificates of various descriptions offered by training firms, academic institutions and other agencies where the meaning of certification can vary (Adams et al., 2004). Because of this lack of certainty regarding many programmes, employers prefer certification that has the respect of the professional community i.e. from professional associations, such as the PMI and the IPMA (Adams et al., 2004). These use a Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBoK), which is an essential element of achieving full professional status for project managers and project management (Turner and Simister, 2000, p2). PMBoK is a collection of processes and knowledge areas generally accepted as best practice within the project management discipline (ProjectSmart, 2000-2005). These processes are detailed in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: PMBoK Process Groups (IBM, 2004)*

The PMI's Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is one of the most widely recognised project management credentials as it recognises academic achievement and

applicable work experience, but it is not a training or certificate programme (Carbone and Gholston, 2004). The PMI also have a continuing certification requirements programme that supports the ongoing educational and professional development of certified Project Management Professionals (PMI, 2005). In the UK, an alternative to the certification programmes that focus on the PMBoK process groups is the PRINCE2 certification programme. It provides a framework that covers the wide variety of disciplines and activities required within a project and it has become a generic, best practice approach suitable for the management of all types of projects (OGC, 2003). There are a wide range of accredited organisations in the UK and worldwide that provide certification in PRINCE2 (OGC, 2003). In contrast to the PMI, practitioners that are certified in PRINCE2 do not have to renew their certification at any point in the future.

### **Benefits of project management certification**

Certification can benefit an industry by supporting minimum competency standards; encouraging use of disciplined practices; and building awareness of best practices (Tripp, 2002). According to Guthrie (1998) and Schwalbe (2006, p30) project management certification can provide many benefits to both the business and project managers, including:

- Demonstrating that project managers have both the fundamental knowledge about project management and the actual business project management experience needed for managing projects.
- Helping project managers to define the levels of skill and types of experience they need to achieve to advance in their careers. As a job seeker they can hold a distinct advantage if they have a marketable certification.
- Ensuring that project management standards are understandable and comparable across an organisation.

It can also provide improved process efficiency; improved quality and quality awareness; improved communications; improved documentation and improved customer satisfaction (Stevenson and Barnes, 2002).

The IPMA (2005), the IPMI (2005) and Adams et al. (2004) set out similar benefits of project management certification, namely:

- Project managers have an internationally acknowledged certificate of their qualification and competence, ensuring that they have the necessary skill set and experience to manage a project successfully.
- Project management certification improves one's capability to deliver better, faster, less expensive products and services.
- Having project managers that are certified can provide a competitive advantage for suppliers of project management services.
- Certification ensures that you have standards by which project management performance can be measured.
- Clients are ensured of getting modern, up to date services from project managers.

By developing qualified project managers and using the right tools and methods, the progress of projects can be monitored, results can be predicted and risks can be evaluated, all of which lead to project success (Guthrie, 1998). Without best practices becoming the standard and a documented project management methodology to provide continuous improvement, companies will not complete projects within budget and they will also fail to measure up to rising customer expectations for on-time delivery and quality (Scanlin, 1998).

### **Drawbacks of project management certification**

Achieving a professional certification requires a commitment of time and money as well as several years of practice in the field (Adams et al., 2004). It can be costly in terms of the amount of employee time required to achieve certification, the training of additional staff in the use of the methodology, and the maintenance of the methodology (Stevenson and Barnes, 2002). It can increase the amount of documentation required and can add so much structure to a project that some believe it can interfere with new and better ways of operating (Stevenson and Barnes, 2002).

In the case of certification from the International Standards Organisation, certification is daunting and lengthy and can become a pursuit of a quality certificate as opposed to a pursuit of quality (Stevenson and Barnes, 2002). Also, some certification programmes, for example the PMP certification from the PMI, require individuals to renew their certification every four years to remain certified (PMI, 2005), which can add an additional cost to an organisation.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this research was to focus on service providers in Ireland that have at least one certified project manager; to examine the drivers behind project management certification, the reasons for selecting a specific project management certification programme, the benefits/drawbacks of project management certification programmes and to determine if project managers really need to be certified.

The completion of an internationally recognised project management certification programme is relatively recent to organisations in Ireland and following a review of the literature it was apparent that there is a lack of both qualitative and quantitative research in this area. As the subject under investigation is new and there was little existing research, the objectives of this research highlighted the need for exploratory research. It was deemed more appropriate to use an inductive approach for this study, which would allow the researchers to collect data and develop a theory as a result of the data analysis.

Due to the small numbers of organisations in Ireland that have certified project managers it would be difficult to identify a significant number of organisations to allow a survey to be conducted that would provide the volume of quantitative data required for analysis. Hence, it was decided to carry out an in-depth study of the experiences of selected organisations, which allows for the collection of rich data.

The research strategy selected for this study was case study. It was decided to conduct multiple case studies, as opposed to a single case study, to obtain a broader view of practices in several organisations in relation to project management certification. Using multiple cases would also allow for comparison and analysis across organisations and the research would not be limited to the experiences and views of a single organisation. For the purposes of this



research five case studies were employed, as it was thought that this number would allow a certain amount of comparison and may be representative of current practices in organisations in Ireland.

### **Target profile of organisations**

The target profile of participant organisations for this research was:

- (a) Organisations that are service providers were the primary focus of this research due to the large number of such organisations in Ireland.
- (b) Organisations in Ireland that employ more than 50 individuals, on the assumption that organisations smaller than these would not have dedicated project managers. Large multinational organisations such as Microsoft, IBM, and Hewlett Packard were excluded as it was felt that organisations such as these would have had project management certification programmes in use for quite a number of years and that they would be more representative of the programmes employed in their country of origin rather than of those used in Ireland.
- (c) Organisations were required to have at least one project manager that had completed a recognised project management certification programme or an adapted version of a recognised certification, such as PMBoK or PRINCE2 in the past one to three years. This time period was selected because organisations where project managers completed the project management certification programme more than three years ago would possibly not be able to recall the benefits/drawbacks of completing a certification programme.

### **Data collection**

As the researchers wished to gather detailed opinions and perspectives on the subject of project management certification, the primary method of data collection was a semi-structured personal interview. This allowed open-ended questions to be asked, which provided the detail and depth of information required by the researchers. Using a semi-structured interview gave the researchers more control over the data collection than other types of data collection methods and also provided the researchers with the opportunity to ask additional questions, when necessary. Even though interviews can be time consuming, they were suitable as a data collection method that could be employed within the timescales available for this research.

## **5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

Research interviews were conducted in April and May 2006 with one project manager in each organisation. The level of experience of the project managers interviewed varied across the organisations. It must be noted that the responses of each interviewee to the questions were based on their own experiences and knowledge of completing a project management certification programme within the context of their organisation. These views do not necessarily represent the overall view of each organisation.

### **Profile of the organisations**

Five organisations participated in the research and a high-level profile of each organisation is presented in Table 1. Some of the organisations have several office locations within Ireland or have offices in multiple locations around the world. As practices can vary across locations within the same organisation for the purposes of this research the findings relate to the location in which the interview was conducted.

	<b>Case One</b>	<b>Case Two</b>	<b>Case Three</b>	<b>Case Four</b>	<b>Case Five</b>
Industry of Organisation	Financial Services	Building Society	Technology Services	Financial Services	Insurance
Total number of Employees	65	1000	4000	2500	2000
Number of IT staff	14	80	50	200	170
Location of offices	Ireland & UK	Ireland	Worldwide	Ireland, Europe & USA	Ireland
Project management certification programme utilised	PMI/IPMA	Adapted from PRINCE2	PMI/IPMA	Adapted from PMI	Adapted from PRINCE2
Year certification was obtained	2005	2003	2004	2003	2005

*Table 1: High-level profile of organisations*

### **Case One**

Case one is a financial services organisation operating in the UK and Ireland with a small information technology (IT) department in its Irish office. Prior to the completion of the project management certification programme the project managers did not have extensive project management experience and they were unsure if they were using best practice. They expressed a desire to obtain a qualification in project management to improve their knowledge as well as developing their own personal career. The benefits to the organisation were also considered and, when approached, management provided their full support for the project managers to complete a project management certification programme and to implement a standard project management methodology as a result.

### **Case Two**

Case two is an Irish building society that had no formal project management processes in place prior to the implementation of a project management certification programme. Project management in this organisation was very haphazard and varied from one project manager to another depending on their experience. Following the development of a major strategy plan at organisational level, senior management realised that if the organisation did not enforce a common methodology for managing projects it would not be possible to accomplish all their proposed plans. There was also a general consensus from management that money could be saved by certifying their project managers and implementing a methodology, which could help to bring projects in on time and within budget. As a result of this decision a customised certification programme was developed and implemented over a period of several months.

### **Case Three**

Case three operates in the technology services industry and has offices worldwide. This organisation tends to work on long-term projects for external customers and the drive for project management certification was partly a result of customer demand, partly due to the desire of management to have a uniform approach to project management as part of

Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) certification, and partly to have it as an additional selling point during the sales process. This organisation was influenced by its parent organisation in the selection of a certification program. Project managers were certified on a phased basis, due to training budget restrictions.

#### **Case Four**

Case four is a large financial services organisation with offices in Ireland, Europe and the USA. The implementation of a customised project management certification programme was driven by a strategic decision at senior management level as there was a desire at organisational level to provide a common method of running and managing projects; to use best practice where possible; to have a single reference point for all staff involved in a project; and to have a consistent, transparent process for tracking and monitoring projects. In this organisation project managers must complete an internal project management certification programme before they are allowed to manage a project.

#### **Case Five**

Case five is an Irish insurance company. In this organisation the main driver for project management certification was the pursuit of CMMI certification. Management made the decision that the organisation should implement an industry-standard certification programme, where training and support is widely available. This resulted in the customisation of the PRINCE2 certification programme to meet the needs of the organisation.

### **Selection and completion of a project management certification programme**

All of the organisations that participated in the research made a decision in the last number of years to certify their project managers. The certification programmes chosen were reasonably consistent across the organisations as shown in Table 1, and consisted of the PMI certification, IPMA certification, or PRINCE2 certification. Only two of the project managers interviewed (case one and case two) had any involvement in the decision as to which certification programme was selected. Both of these project managers highlighted the need for certification to management, who in turn requested that the project managers identify a suitable course. In both cases the project managers selected a certification programme that was recommended to them by colleagues.

Four of the project managers interviewed (cases one, two, three and five) were aware of the reasons for selecting a particular certification programme and the associated project management methodology while the fifth project manager interviewed (case four) was not aware of the reasons as to why the particular certification programme was selected. The reasons varied across the organisations depending on their specific requirements. There was a general requirement for a certification programme that used a project management methodology that is widely recognised by other organisations. In one organisation (case three) where CMMI was being implemented, CMMI recommended the implementation of the project management methodology from the PMI certification programme. This organisation was partly influenced by this requirement and partly influenced by its parent organisation in the United States where the value of PMI certification was seen in other US-based organisations. Case five is also implementing CMMI, but this organisation does not seem to have been influenced by the recommendation of CMMI. The main focus in this organisation related to having a methodology where certification, training, assistance and support can be

provided by more than one supplier. As a result, PRINCE2 certification was selected because of the availability of numerous training providers.

**Drivers of project management certification**

The main driver, which was consistent across the large organisations (cases two, three, four and five) was a decision by senior management to implement a uniform approach to project management within the organisation as a whole. Another organisation (case two) believed that by certifying their project managers and implementing a project management methodology as a result, they would save money in the long term by helping to bring projects in on time and within budget. This resulted in the selection of an industry-recognised certification programme and the subsequent certification of project managers.

However, in two organisations (case three and case five) there were additional factors that influenced management’s decision to obtain certification. Both of these organisations were driven by their desire to obtain CMMI certification, of which a requirement is to have a project management methodology in place. Case three, whose customers are external to the organisation, also wanted to have certified project managers as a potential differentiating factor when competing with other vendors for business. The project manager in this case was of the opinion that their customers would see the value in having certified project managers and the project manager interviewed believes that the organisation was pursuing certification to ensure they were winning new projects, which may be due to the industry that this organisation operates in.

In the smallest organisation (case one) it was possible for the project managers to directly influence management and to set out a business case for obtaining certification, which would progress their own careers yet at the same time have a positive impact on the organisation. The decision to complete a certification programme was made within a very short timeframe, which contrasted with the longer timeframe required for the larger organisations, which may be due to the smaller size of this organisation.

While there was some interest in the personal development and training of staff in all organisations, this seems to have been only a minor consideration. There was no requirement in any of the organisations to certify their project managers and implement a project management methodology for compliance or regulatory reasons.

**Benefits of completing a project management certification programme**

Regardless of the size of an organisation or its industry type, the completion of a certification programme by project managers can be of benefit to both the individual and the organisation (IPMA, 2004) as is shown in Table 2.

<b>Benefits of project management certification</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>
Defines standard project management practices through the implementation of a standard project management methodology	5
Defines the role of the project manager and competency requirements for the role	3
Project management positions are now held by individuals that are suitably qualified to be in the role	3
Helps to establish the project management credentials of an individual	2
Assists with external recruitment	1

*Table 2: Benefits of project management certification*

Two project managers (case two and case five) were in agreement with this and stated that certification can help to establish the project management credentials of an individual. They also stated that when an individual completes the certification programme they can put details of the certification on their CV. These individuals will also retain the qualification if they leave the organisation, unless there is a requirement to renew the certification, after which period the certification will be no longer be valid.

All of the project managers identified the implementation of a standard project management practices as a benefit to the organisation. In particular, case four and case five also found that having a standard project management methodology in place: facilitates the movement of team members from one project to another project; can reduce the overhead required for training of new staff members; and makes it is easier for new staff to become aware of the processes that must be followed when working on a project. However, a third project manager (case three) believed that there were no major additional benefits following the implementation of their new industry-recognised methodology after the completion of the certification programme, as they had a good methodology in place prior to certification.

Three of the larger organisations (cases two, four and five) stated that certification helps to: define the role of the project manager; define career paths; and define competency profiles for each role in a way that staff can understand, so they know what they need to achieve in order to progress. These organisations all have a hierarchical organisation structure with a vertical chain of command and the definition of roles and career paths is of particular importance to staff within these types of organisations. These organisations also found that project management positions are now held by individuals that are suitably qualified to be in the role and have completed a certification programme. Prior to the certification some individuals adopted project management roles because they wanted to work in that position, or in other instances an individual was given the task of managing a project where they may not have wanted it. In either case, these individuals were not always the most appropriate person for the position. By having a certification programme in place and making certain that all project managers in these organisations complete the certification programme ensures that only individuals that are suitably qualified can hold the role of project manager. However, one project manager (case two) did state that in some instances projects were still run by project managers that were not yet certified. This was due to the fact that all project managers are not yet certified as a result of training budget restrictions or time constraints in relation to their existing workload. While the remaining two organisations (case one and case three), also have a vertical reporting structure, the organisation structure is flatter than the larger organisation as the number of employees in each office is small and there are a reduced number of layers within the chain of command.

Certification can also help with external recruitment according to one organisation (case five). An organisation can advertise for project managers with a specific certification, which can result in reduced overhead in training and getting a new staff member up to speed with the project management practices that are in place. While this was identified as a benefit to certification, none of the project managers interviewed stated whether they had recruited individuals that were already certified.

### **Drawbacks to completing a project management certification programme**

Even though the findings identify benefits to an organisation of having certified project managers, there are also some drawbacks to obtaining certification as is shown in Table 3.

<b>Drawbacks of project management certification</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>
Requirement to comply with training budgets, thus lengthening the time required to certify all project managers	3
Completing a standard certification programme requires a lot of time and effort	2
Lack of re-certification (relates to PRINCE2)	2
Cost of re-certification (relates to PMI)	1

*Table 3: Drawbacks of project management certification*

The main difficulty for certifying project managers in three of the larger organisations (cases two, three and five) was in relation to training budgets, which has lengthened the time required to enable all project managers to become certified. The project manager in the other large organisation (case four) was not aware of any issues in relation to the training budget. In contrast, this was not an issue in the smallest organisation (case one) as both project managers completed the certification programme at the same time.

Project managers (case one and case three) that participated in the six-month long PMI/IPMA training course, rather than an internally adapted certification course stated that obtaining certification was very time consuming. The certification had to be completed within a certain timeframe, and required the project managers to take one day a week out of their normal working week to attend classes, which they found difficult when trying to complete their normal day-to-day tasks at the same time. None of the remaining three project managers (cases two, four and five), who completed certification programmes that were customised for the organisation, detailed any issues with workloads or time commitments when completing the certification programme. This may suggest that there may be issues with completing an out-of-the-box certification programme as opposed to a certification programme that is customised for an organisation.

There were no downsides identified in relation to cost of project managers completing the certification programme or in relation to the provision of time for staff to complete the training course. The cost of certification was borne by the organisations in all cases.

There may be some difficulties in the future in relation to renewing the PMI/IPMA certification. Even though the organisations that selected these certification programmes (cases one, three, and four) welcome the continuing certification programme, one project manager interviewed (case three) expressed a view that the budget may not be available within their organisation to complete all the extra tasks that are required for project managers to renew certification. None of the three project managers were entirely sure what had to be done to renew their certification. This may be due to the fact that there is still a substantial amount of time before their certification has to be renewed and none of the project managers have actively started to fulfill the conditions of renewal. As the certification is valid for four years and each of the project managers only completed this certification within the last two years there has been no drive to focus on renewing certification. However, one of these project managers (case three) felt that the time period between certification and the renewal of certification is quite short as the first two years of the four year certification period could be spent driving the implementation and rolling out the associated methodology, which does not allow a lot of time to complete all the other requirements for recertification, in addition to the daily job of managing projects.

Certification renewal is not required in the organisations that implemented an adapted version of PRINCE2 (case two and case five) as there is no renewal programme in place. Both of these project managers were of the opinion that maybe there should be a recertification programme for PRINCE2. However, one of these organisations (case five) is implementing CMMI, which does require re-certification, which means that their project management methodology will be reviewed and certified again at some point in the future.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This research focused on project management practices in Ireland, specifically in relation to project management certification. It examined the drivers behind obtaining project management certification; the selection of a project management certification programme; and the benefits/drawbacks to an organisation of obtaining project management certification.

Tripp (2002) finds that certification can encourage the use of disciplined practices and build awareness of best practices. This study agrees with these and also adds to this body of knowledge by finding that the main driver in larger organisations for the completion of a project management certification programme was a desire by senior management to have a uniform approach to project management across the organisation. As a result, management provided their full support for the completion of the certification programme and they also provided the time, money and the resources required for the certification, which is in line with the existing literature (Brown, 1999, Loo, 1996). However, the main driver in the smallest organisation was the personal desire of the project manager to enhance her career prospects and her knowledge of project management, which was not identified as a driving factor in the existing literature. This may suggest that project managers in a small organisation can have more direct influence on management to obtain their support, which can benefit both themselves and the organisation. The main driver for the organisation that provided technology services was the expectation of external customers that their suppliers would have certified project managers, which may suggest that organisations that are competing for business against other vendors may require certification in order to maintain a competitive advantage. This adds to the findings of Adams et al. (2004), the IPMA (2005), and the IPMI (2005) and who state that certified project managers can provide a competitive advantage for suppliers of project management services.

Adams et al. (2004) and Stevenson and Barnes (2002) state that to achieve professional certification costs time and money. While certification does cost time and money, the findings of this research show that organisations were willing to pay for the cost of the certification and to allow their staff the time to complete the certification programme. However, the time and money required to certify project managers did depend on the organisation and their approach to certification. This study found that project managers that participated in the PMI or IPMA professional certification programme found it very time-consuming. This would suggest that individuals who wish to complete the PMI or IPMA certification programme should take this into consideration when making their decision. This was not the case with the standard PRINCE2 certification as this certification programme can be completed within a week. However, if an organisation decides to develop a customised certification programme this can take a substantial amount of time and money, and this needs to be taken into consideration.

Guthrie (1998) and Schwalbe (2006, p30) detail several benefits that project management certification can provide to project managers and to an organisation. The results of this research concur with these and also add to them by finding that certification helps to: define the role of the project manager; define career paths; and define competency profiles for each role, so that staff knew what they need to achieve in order to progress. These findings were more prevalent in the larger organisations where the organisations wanted a clear definition of the competency requirements for project managers and only wanted individuals who were suitably qualified to hold the position to manage projects. In addition, the larger organisations also stated that certification can help with external recruitment, resulting in a reduction in the overhead of training of new staff members. This was not identified as a benefit within the existing literature.

The literature did not identify any issues in relation to the renewal of project management certification or the lack of recertification programmes. Yet, the findings of this research identified the lack of a recertification programme with PRINCE2 as a possible drawback to this certification programme. The findings also showed that while individuals who completed the PMI and IPMA certification programmes welcomed the recertification programme, they were of the opinion that the cost of recertification and the time required to complete all the required tasks for recertification may be an issue in the future. At this point in time none of these organisations have reached the stage where recertification is required, so these are perceived to be potential future issues by the project managers interviewed. When deciding which certification programme is most suitable for their needs, organisations need to consider the availability and cost of recertification, where recertification is available.

Many organisations adapt an industry-recognised certification programme to their own specific requirements, as project life cycles and management structures are different in every organisation (Zielinski, 2005). The organisations in this study that tailored the certification programme to meet their needs were large organisations, however one large organisation did not adapt a certification programme. The large organisations that did adapt the certification programme were well-established and have been in existence for many years while the large organisation that did not adapt had expanded through the acquisition of other organisations. This may suggest that large, well-established organisations require a certification programme that can be modified to fit with their existing business processes. This agrees with the findings of Garcia (2005) who states that if a standard that does not fit within the framework of the organisation it will not achieve its promised benefits.

In conclusion, organisations considering project management certification need to think about their reasons for doing so. It is possible that if there are good project management practices already in place that are used consistently across an organisation that there may not be a requirement to certify project managers. Prior to certification one organisation had implemented an internally developed methodology and had recognised the benefits of using a standard methodology that are presented in the existing literature (Loo, 2002, Abbasi and Al-Mharmah, 2000, Dicks, 2000, Payne and Turner, 1999, Elonen and Artto, 2003). As a result, in this organisation there was no evidence to suggest that the completion of a certification program and implementation of a recognised methodology was of any additional benefit to the organisation in terms of project management practice. What was evident from this research was that there exists a desire for certification in order to have internal and external



recognition that certain quality standards were in place in relation to project management. There was also an aspiration that project managers should be suitably qualified to be in the role. However, certification can be costly and organisations must be willing to spend the necessary time and money if they wish to pursue certification, which may also include additional costs for the renewal of certification or for the customisation of the certification programme to suit the needs of the business.

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