



29th World Congress International Project Management Association (IPMA) 2015, IPMA WC 2015, 28-30 September – 1 October 2015, Westin Playa Bonita, Panama

PMD Pro forward: making the world better one project at a time

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Abstract

This paper looks at the results and benefits of the first five years of the “Guide to the PMD Pro” and its accompanying certification. The “Guide to the PMD Pro” is a project management standard designed to cross cultural boundaries and provide sound project management practices to those working within the humanitarian and international development sectors. It examines its origins and the story of the international development sector partnering with the private sector and the project management community to develop a contextualized body of knowledge, which promotes good practice, but remains sensitive to cultural variations. The paper goes on to analyze the reasons behind PMD Pro’s rapid growth and assesses what impact it is having in seventy plus countries and cultures around the world. The impacts described include an increasingly common language across the development sector to describe projects and increased efficiency and effectiveness in project delivery. In one study, 95% of responding field leaders agreed that the investment in project management training for their team has paid off and 86% of trained project managers made changes to their practice as a result of the training. In the words of one trainee, “It is the reason why some kids in Zambia have clean water, why some clinics were built on time and why a poor farmer in Eastern Zambia harvested. Never has a process improvement training and a catalogue of tools aided our work in the manner PMD Pro has.”

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of IPMA WC 2015.

Keywords: Accessible; Training; Tools; Standards; International development; Cultural boundaries; Knowledge; Practice; Global; Impact

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1. Introduction

The end of 2015 is a watershed moment for the global development community as NGOs, donors, governments and international organizations plot a new course for sustainable development beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Looking forward, there remain considerable challenges but also huge opportunities to achieve the ambition of a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace.

PMD Pro (Project Management in Development Professional) is a project management approach that has been specifically designed with NGOs to improve and standardize organizational processes. Owned by PM4NGOs (Project Management for Non-Government Organizations), it is appropriate, accessible, and affordable for project managers to develop the skills they need to deliver effective projects, and improve their accountability to donors and communities so as to meet the challenges of 21st century development.

The Guide to the PMD Pro is already achieving considerable success, with UNICEF, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CARITAS, Mercy Corps, Greenpeace, Heifer International, PATH, Islamic Relief, Save the Children and others taking up the accessible training courses and online tutorials and significantly changing the way that they manage projects.

The numbers of development professionals exposed to PMD Pro is increasing incrementally and ten thousand people from over 70 countries have already achieved certification at Stage 1 and Stage 2. As more candidates and organizations adopt this approach, a common language is emerging in international development that crosses cultures and country borders, raising standards across the sector, as tools and techniques are replicated from project to project.

2. Rigor and standards

In the private sector, recruiters routinely seek staff with professional qualifications such as Prince 2 (AXELOS), PMP (Project Management Institute), and the IPMA 4-L Certifications. These excellent certifications have enabled engineers, software designers, and other developers to run their projects efficiently, using standard processes to achieve and share results.

The NGO sector, in taking their steer from donor proposals, tended to focus on project design and monitoring and evaluation, setting up projects in this way. NGOs therefore became very good at determining the approach to project delivery, but were less good at setting standards and processes to ensure that projects were actually delivered consistently. Field staff often found that they were operating without a ‘rule book’ for the other important phases of project management.

PMD Pro has successfully combined learning from existing NGO approaches with the rigor and standards of the more expensive high-end project management courses. Tools and techniques have been adapted for use in developing countries, and the result is a common framework and language for project management that is widely accessible for development professionals around the world.

“Never has a process of improvement training and catalogue of tools aided our work in the manner PMD Pro has,” says Clement Chipokolo, from World Vision, Zambia. “There have been many winners as a result. The recipients or customers who benefit from our work in the community, the donors who are getting value for money, the staff who are now confidently managing projects. In short, PMD Pro has added project management integrity to our work.”

3. Developed for NGOs, by NGOs

In early 2007, a number of NGOs, including Save the Children, Oxfam, Care, World Vision, Habitat for Humanity, CRS, Plan International, and Mercy Corps, asked LINGOs, a capacity building organization specializing in NGO development, to develop appropriate project management learning materials for the NGO sector.

Helped by a grant from the Project Management Institute, LINGOs set up a working group of NGO specialists, and after consulting widely, concluded that current ways of working across the sector were inadequate. The group tested ideas and approaches, identified learning objectives, and developed an outline curriculum for a new project

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