

HOW TO SHAPE COMPETENCES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

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Abstract

Project management standards like ICB or PMBOK® shape competences and competence development since the 1990th – mainly starting with the 2nd edition of PMBOK® (Caupin, G.; Knöpfel, H.; Morris, P.; Motzel, E.; Pannenbäcker, 1999) of PMI® and IPMA's ICB2 (PMI, 2000) – and with a strong focus on the certification of project management competences. Today new standards like ICB4 (IPMA 2015: IPMA Individual Competence Baseline – ICB 4, 2015) are much broader – and they go beyond the limits of the classical standards. That is a major challenge for the implementation. Core changes are discussed in this paper and perspectives regarding the implementation. And even in the extended standards there are gaps that must be taken into account.

Key words: *project management, competence management, ICB, PMBOK®*

JEL code: *O21, O22*

Introduction

Competences in project management are developed in study courses, in seminars and workshops, and through practical experience. Competence areas are shaped by standards like ICB or PMBOK®. Such standards are used for the certification of competences in the 4-level approach of IPMA or in the PMP® approach of PMI® for example. Competence assessment is important for the selection of personnel and for the organization of competence development.

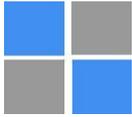
While ICB2 and ICB3 are mainly shaped for the certification processes of IPMA, now the new ICB4 has a much broader perspective – more on the competence development of the individual:

“The IPMA Individual Competence Baseline 4th Version (ICB4) delivers a comprehensive inventory of competences for individuals to use in career development, certification, training, education, consulting, research, and more.“ (IPMA, 2015)

When project management associations started with standards like ICB2 or PMBOK's second edition in the 1990th project management was underdeveloped compared to the situation today. Today organizations have much more project experience and are often shaped as projectized organizations. Study programs in many faculties include modules on project management – full study programs on project management are available. The requirements for the development of project management competences change – and the standards follow. ICB4 extends the scope of the competences and goes much deeper into critical aspects of competences.

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ICB4

In October 2015 the 4th edition of the IPMA Competence Baseline of the International Project Management Association was published. This ICB 4 is not a simple extension of ICB 3. In ICB 4 we find another set of competences and another strategy. Even the title of ICB changed – now it's IPMA **Individual** Competence Baseline.

ICB 4 has 29 competence elements (ICB 3 has 46, ICB2 had 42) in 3 competence areas:

Perspective

dealing with strategies, governance, values and further important aspects, with following elements:

1. Strategy
2. Governance, structures and processes
3. Compliance, standards and regulations
4. Power and interest
5. Culture and values

People

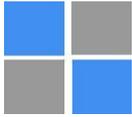
dealing with personal and interpersonal competences, with following elements:

1. Self-reflection and self-management
2. Personal integrity and reliability
3. Personal communication
4. Relations and engagement
5. Leadership
6. Teamwork
7. Conflict and crisis
8. Resourcefulness
9. Negotiation
10. Results orientation

Practice

dealing with technical aspects of managing projects, programs, and portfolios, with following elements:

1. Design
2. Requirements, objectives and benefits
3. Scope
4. Time
5. Organization and Information
6. Quality
7. Finance
8. Resources
9. Procurement and partnership
10. Plan and control
11. Risk and opportunities
12. Stakeholders
13. Change and transformation
14. Select and balance.



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For each competence element the contributions to manage projects, programs and portfolios are separated in ICB 4 (in contrast to ICB 3). That is good to improve competence development within these 3 levels. With the competence area on **perspectives** the strategical aspects of project management will be strengthened – that was a weak point in ICB 3.

ICB4 on Personal Communication

With a focus on the ICB4 competence 4.4.3 on **Personal Communication** we want to explain the approach of competence descriptions in ICB4. All competence descriptions in ICB4 start with short text elements dealing with the definition, the purpose and the description of the competence – here for example

“**Definition**

Personal communication includes the exchange of proper information, delivered accurately and consistently to all relevant parties.

Purpose

The purpose of this competence element is to enable the individual to communicate efficiently and effectively in a variety of situations, to different audiences and across different cultures.

Description

Personal communication describes the essential aspects of effective communication. Both the content and the means of communication (tone of voice, channel, and amount of information) have to be clear and appropriate for the target audience. The individual has to verify the understanding of messages by actively listening to the target audience and seeking feedback. The individual promotes open and sincere communication and is able to use various means for communication (presentations, meetings, written forms, etc.) and acknowledges their value and limitations.”

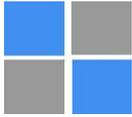
After that there are lists of knowledge and skill items:

”**Knowledge**

- Differences between information and message
- Different methods of communication
- Different questioning techniques
- Feedback rules
- Facilitation
- Presentation techniques
- Communication channels and styles
- Rhetoric
- Characteristics of body language
- Communication technologies

Skills

- Use different ways of communication and different styles for effective communication
- Active listening
- Questioning techniques
- Empathy
- Presentation and moderation techniques
- Effective use of body language”.



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The main parts of the competence descriptions deal with key competence indicators. For personal communication there are 5 indicators in ICB4:

1. Provide clear and structured information to others and verify their understanding
2. Facilitate and promote open communication
3. Choose communication styles and channels to meet the needs of the audience, situation and management level
4. Communicate effectively with virtual teams
5. Employ humor and sense of perspective when appropriate.

Besides general descriptions on these indicators there are strong hints to promote personal competence development – here for example:

- Obtain confirmation that the receiver of information has understood the message as intended.
- Focus on the receiver, not on the information itself, and ask for validation when needed.
- Change the communication channels and style depending on the situation.

Each of these competences in ICB4 is described 3 times – once with the focus on projects, then with the focus on programs and finally with the focus on portfolios. The 3 corresponding descriptions are mainly identical! – “project” is replaced by “program” and then “program” is replaced by “portfolio” – and a few more changes.

Despite the extension of competence descriptions in ICB4 there are significant gaps. Competence indicators for example must change esp. with growing project maturity. Well developed and experienced teams need other guidelines than beginners.

On the scope of Project Management Standards

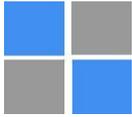
PMBOK® and ICB are the leading standards in the project management community as verified in many surveys, for example in IPMA survey report.

These standards are totally different – ICB with the strong competence approach – PMBOK® with the process approach – so they are complementary and one can support the other.

Considerations on the scope of such standards must deal with the question **how far** they should extend the scope (how many knowledge areas, how many processes, how many competences, ...) and **how deep** they should develop the concepts in these standards.

What is the main focus of the standards (harmonizing terminology and concepts, personal development and training of project management competences, certification of project management competences, ...)?

Going from ICB2 through ICB 3 to ICB4 we have a scope creep. ICB2 has about 30 pages – most people use the version in 3 languages with 90 pages in total (IPMA). ICB3 has a bit more than 200 pages, ICB4 has even more than 400 pages.



Compared to the significant changes in ICB4 we have a smooth evolution on the PMBOK® side – with the additional knowledge area on stakeholder management in PMBOK5 for example separated from the project communication area in PMBOK4 and some changes in descriptions.

With the “big” ICB4 we have appropriate guidelines for development and evaluation of competences. But that’s not enough to teach and train competences. For individual communication we have for example the figure below with many more aspects not mentioned in ICB4.

Semantical Model of Human Communication

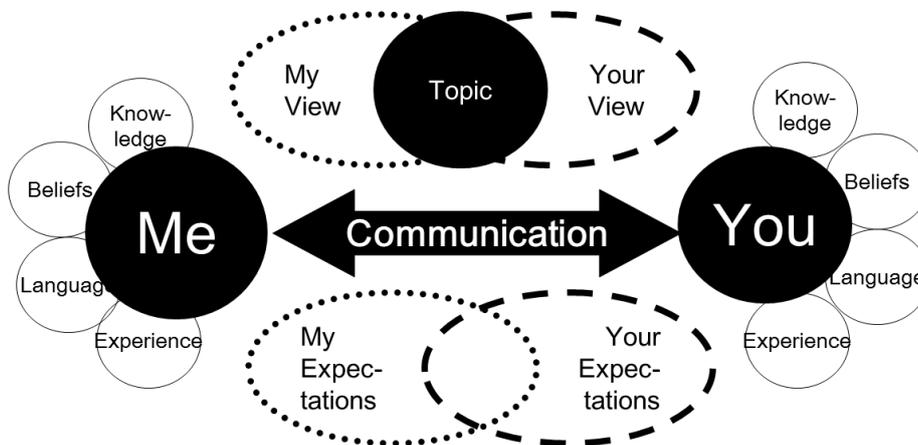


Figure 1: Semantical Model of Human Communication

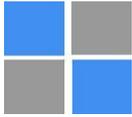
Source: Reusch, Peter J.A. 2000

To support project communication management in the context of PMBOK® there is an additional Project Management Communications Bible (Dow, William; Taylor Bruce 2008). To support education and training in the context of ICB there are handbooks like (Hermarij, John 2013) and (Gessler, Michael, 2012). Such sources are not yet available for ICB4. And when we start to develop such sources it is not only the question how far and how deep we want to go. It’s also the question how to integrate new concepts like sustainability (Reusch, Peter J. A.; Reusch, S. 2016).

On competence development and assessment

Contributions on the evaluation and development of competences are not fully developed in ICB4. In ICB4 there is annex D with the competence levels:

- **“Knowledge:** Exhibit memory of learned materials by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts and answers
- **Comprehension:** Demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptions, and stating the main ideas.



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- **Application:** Using acquired knowledge to solve problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules
- **Analysis:** Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes, make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations
- **Synthesis:** Build a structure or pattern from diverse elements and act of putting parts together to form a whole; compile information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions
- **Evaluation:** Present and defend opinions by making judgements about information, validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria.”

This approach is much more complex than the evaluation of competences according to former ICBs. The application of such measures for competences has a long tradition in pedagogics and education with contributions of Benjamin Bloom and others. For project management such measures must be developed. When the evaluation of competences in project management come closer to the evaluation of competences in education in general it will be easier to build bridges between higher education in project management and training of projects management associations and project management consultants.

Conclusions

The changes in ICB 4 compared to ICB 3 are so strong that all those who apply ICB 3 will have a lot of work to adapt their concepts to ICB 4. The redesign of the certification according to ICB 4 will take years.

ICB4 is an open standard that will lead to different kind of implementations, depending of the way and the level in which competences are developed. Many aspects of ICB4 will remain mainly for individual competence development, while others can be harmonized and applied for broad certification procedures.

For each implementation of ICB4 we must fix the scope: how far and how deep we will go in our competence descriptions.

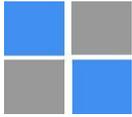
ICB4 has separate chapters for the same competences – project management, program management, and portfolio management are separated. That is appropriate if competences in these areas are developed separately. For this kind of separate development in many cases there will not be enough time. We need compact guidelines covering all three areas.

ICB4 can help to harmonize all kinds of education and competence development – competence development in higher education and in practical work in projects. But this harmonization can only succeed when experts from all areas give support. It's a hard job, but when we succeed all people working in projects will have the advantages of easier recruitment, easier personal development, etc. Finally companies can save money and labor markets emerge.

With the new ICB4 the Conceptual Reference Model for Competencies and Related Objects and further general standards on competences can be used (ISO 2009).

Even in the context of IPMA standards we must develop bridges to other standards like IPMA's Organizational Competence Baseline – OCB (IPMA).

We should come back the question “What Can Standards Standardize in International Project Management?” (Reusch, Peter J. A.; Löhr, Katrin, 2012; Reusch, Peter J. A.; Khushnood, Muhammad; Vasquez Kaufmann, Sergio, 2011).



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