



CHAMPIONS SECURE

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT TO HELP PMP ASPIRANTS IN EXAM PREPARATION



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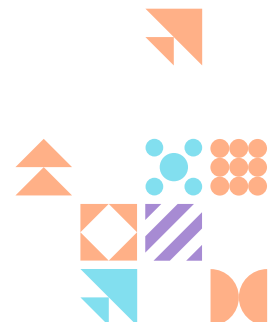
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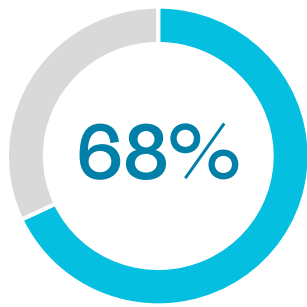
Background

The relevance of project management is growing in both traditionally projectized and non-projectized environments as organizations transform themselves into digital businesses. To make this transition painless, they need highly skilled professionals who can deliver superior project performance. Hence, the demand is growing for project managers with the Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] certification, which is an endorsement of a project manager's project execution skills.

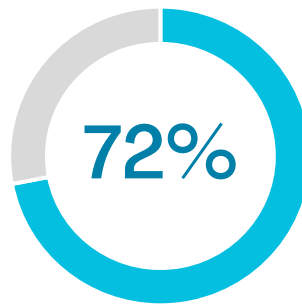
*Data from PMI's Earning Power:
Project Management Salary Survey,
10th Edition, shows how much organizations
value the PMP[®] certification. A PMP[®] certified
project manager in India earns more than
35 percent higher in median salary than
someone without the certification.*



Findings from *PMI's Pulse of the Profession*, 2018 survey:



of organizations in India have processes to develop project management competency in-house



have training programs on project management tools and techniques

However, the path toward PMP® certification can still be daunting. PMP® aspirants struggle due to the lack of a roadmap to guide them through this journey.

Challenges

Preparing for the PMP® examination is like trying one's hand at making coffee, working on getting the right mix of the decoction, milk, and sugar. Project managers often go through a few ordeals before finding the best approach toward getting PMP® certified.



PMI India Champions at Hewlett Packard identified the lack of a well-defined, repeatable process in the organization that simplifies the approach toward PMP® certification as a significant pain point for aspirants. The company has a large number of project managers across its offices in India.

The other challenge was the prevalence of misconceptions about the value and applicability of the PMP® certification, even as agile project management gains ground. The Champions felt the need to create awareness about the relevance of PMP® in the agile world.

For example, project managers need to understand that in an agile project scenario, teams need to apply PMP® recommended tools and techniques like facilitated workshops and group creativity, along with agile principles, for requirements gathering. Hence, they need to know both traditional and agile methods in an agile project environment.

There is also an erroneous belief that any waterfall-based approach can be converted into an agile format. However, in reality, the smaller tasks in a large project can follow agile methods but the larger project framework can continue to be under waterfall.



The approach

The PMI India Senior Champions, who had decided to chart a way out of the common challenges that PMP® aspirants face, knew that it would not be an easy job. Experience across organizations has shown that project management advocacy often encounters roadblocks such as unfriendly stakeholders, curbs in finance, and difficulty in sustaining and scaling up an initiative.

Hence, they adopted the following principles in this journey:

- a. **Experiential:** include multi-dimensional experiences to build a framework
- b. **Synergize:** If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together
- c. **Analogy:** One good analogy is worth three hours of discussion
- d. **Passion:** Fulfilling vision comes from passion
- e. Tapping **multiple sources**
- f. **Fun:** make learning enjoyable



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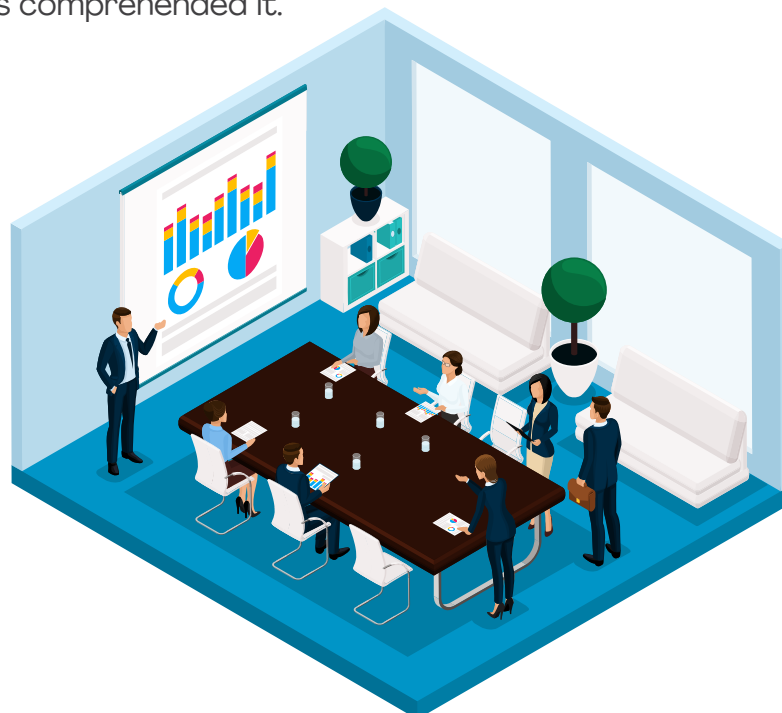
The First Milestone

Buy-in from Senior Management and Learning and Development (L&D)

At the start of the journey, the Champions picked some common myths that existed among senior managers such as, “Project managers can understand and study PMI’s *A Guide to Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*® on their own,” “If you are a project manager, you ought to know *PMBOK Guide*,” or “The *PMBOK Guide* is self-explanatory; we don’t need to teach it to project managers.”

As a first step, the Champions team set up a meeting with the senior management to explain why an organization-level framework to facilitate certification is required. The following were some of the rationale put forth:

- a. During the PMP® certification exam, project managers are tested on their understanding of the *PMBOK Guide*, and how to apply it to the real-world. Hence, it is a useful determinant of how well a project manager has comprehended it.



- b. The shared knowledge of project managers who have undergone certification is a great way to add to the depth of understanding of aspirants.
- c. PMP® certification can be a long and tiresome journey if undertaken alone. But along with fellow travelers and mentors, it can be more fruitful and enjoyable.
- d. A side outcome of this exercise would be the creation of a knowledge pool as project managers and aspirants share their experiences and insights.

The team knew that a top-down approach would be critical for the success of this initiative. Hence, once the senior management and L&D provided the endorsement, the execution became easier.

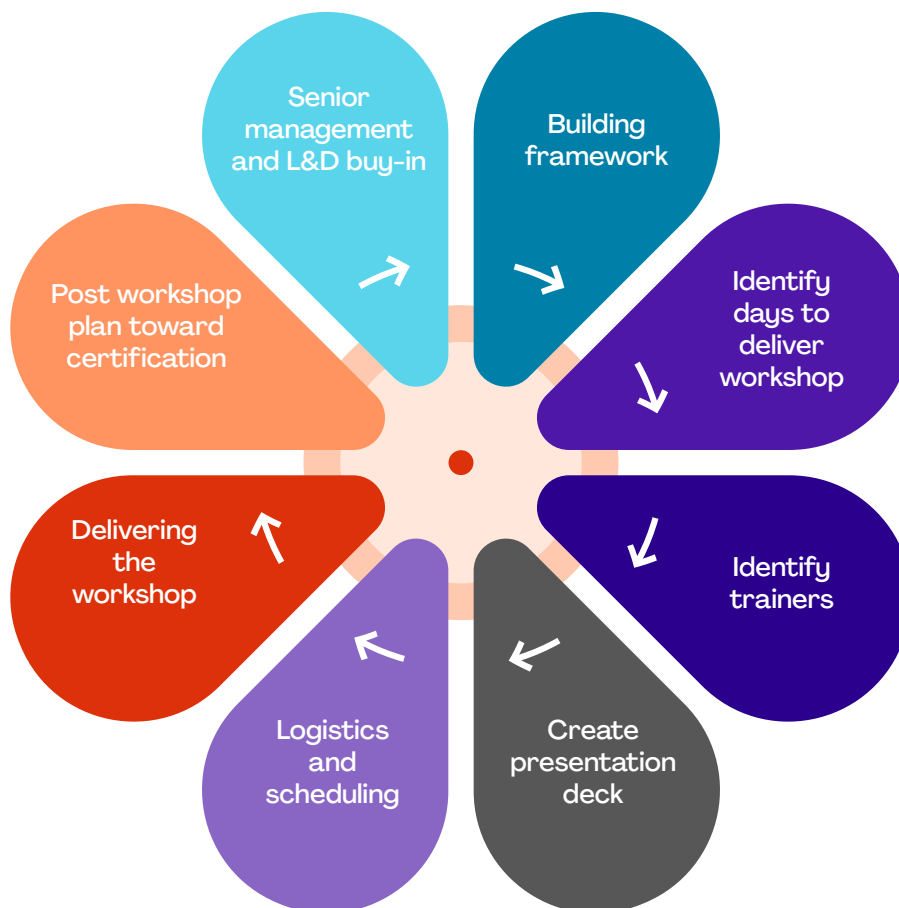


Figure 1: The multi-pronged approach toward building an organizational framework to facilitate PMP certification

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Second Milestone

Building a Framework for the PMP Workshop

As a next step, the team worked on the best possible days to hold training workshops. After multiple rounds of discussions, the Champions decided to organize the workshops on weekdays spread over two weeks. This was done to ensure that the participants had sufficient time to absorb the learning, without letting it interfere with their work responsibilities. The days were chosen carefully – Wednesdays and Thursdays – so as to minimize absenteeism due to work commitments during the start of the week or avoid slacking toward the weekend.

Identifying like-minded trainers was the other task on the agenda. The Champions looked for volunteers who displayed a sense of passion for project management. Only then would they be able to convey the concepts of each Knowledge Area in a way that each participant understands it.

The Champions tapped their network within the organization to find the right trainers. Since it is not possible to find project managers who excel in every Knowledge Area, the search took time.





Following the selection of the training team, each member was assigned a Knowledge Area and tasked with developing training material on it. To make the presentations effective, the following were some measures taken:



Looking for ways to simplify the concepts to be conveyed.



Gathering information from multiple sources for each Knowledge Area, for example, they referred to the *PMBOK Guide* to ensure the tone, phrases, and jargons are consistent with the PMP exam. Some resources were Rita Mulcahy's work that provides a deeper explanation of each concept with effective examples and Andy Crowe's explanation of concepts in a lighter vein.



Use of crosswords, tests and quizzes to make the learning easy to absorb. For example, snap tests to work out problems related to Project Schedule, Cost and Procurement Management, or application-oriented quizzes for Project Scope Management. Aspirants got crosswords and quizzes to solve after class.



Use analogies to explain concepts. For example, the use of bowling techniques in a cricket game to explain precision.



Identifying and mitigating risks during the program, such as the need for a response plan if a trainer is suddenly unavailable for a session.

3

Third Milestone

Logistics, Scheduling

The Champions worked with the L&D department and various business units to select the right set of participants for the workshop. Each workshop had an intake limit of 20 so as to personalize the experience and make the discussions fruitful.

The venue for the workshop was a spacious room, with abundant lighting to keep the mood good. They also ensured that the training rooms had lengthy writing boards so that trainers could use them to draw network diagrams to explain concepts.



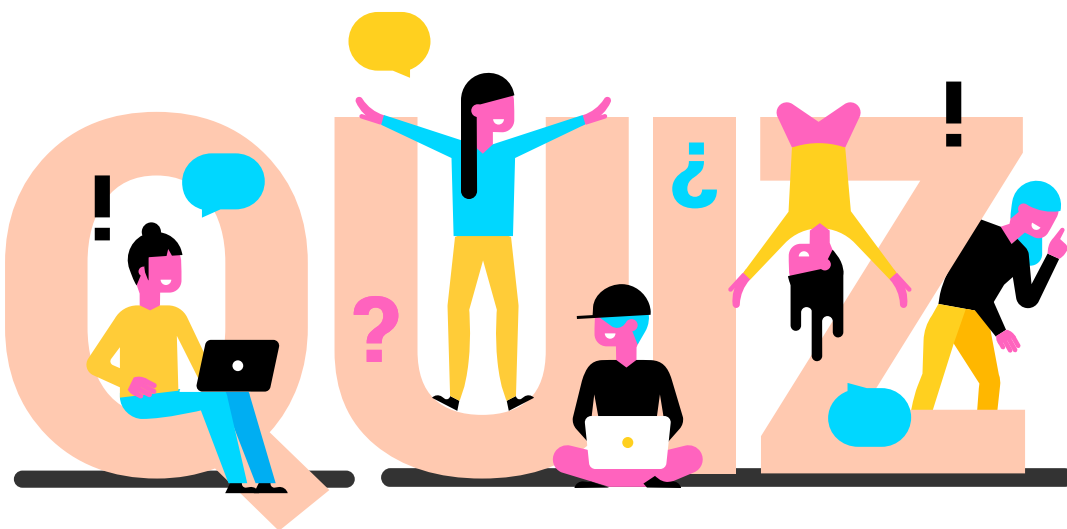
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Fourth Milestone

Delivering the Workshop

The workshops started with an elevated pitch to build anticipation in participants – for example, project management in the VUCA world (or in other words, a world of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity).

To sustain interest, the team organized a number of activities such as crosswords or quizzes. They also made the sessions interactive and encouraged participants to work out problems on the drawing board. Finally, to ensure the learning was well-absorbed, the participants received homework based on the day’s learning and took part in Q&A sessions before the start of the next day’s session.



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Fifth Milestone Creating a Study Path

The last session focused on the benefits of taking PMI membership and the study plan toward the PMP certification exam. The study plan included the books to be used for reference, forming study groups, study methods to make group learning effective, the best way to approach the four-hour mock exams, the time to set aside for preparation, and the application process. The workshop participants received assistance in filling the application and support in case of an audit.

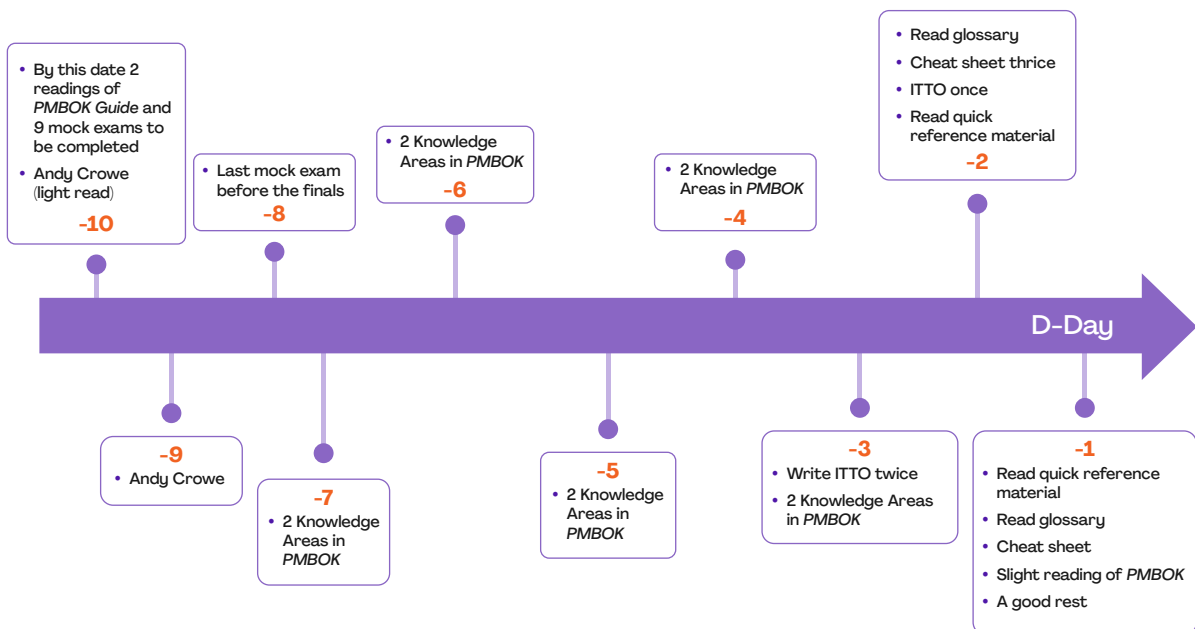


Figure 2: A detailed roadmap leading up to the PMP certification exam day

The outcome

There are currently four trainers each in Bengaluru and Chennai delivering PMP certification training workshops. Collectively, they have organized around 15 workshops between June 2015 and August 2017 across these two cities. The program has received appreciation from participants, as is evident from their feedback.

The course was very well organized the instructor's training method is excellent. The course served its objectives

Trainers were excellent good motivation to write PMP

Sowmya and Sumanth have been very helpful and have streamlined the PMP program in a simpler way. Really appreciated all their efforts. Thank you once gain.

Below are some of the key outcomes of this program:

98+ aspirants trained

96.2% said they would recommend our session!

80+ certified in past 14 months

5+ helped throughout audit process

3 innovative teaching methods

75 applications reviewed

4 trainers each in BLR, CHN

95% average feedback score

This tried and tested PMP certification framework can be implemented by other organizations. It will highly simplify the exam preparation process and roadmap for PMP certification for its project managers, and thereby improve the project management competency level of its teams.