



## **PMP: Is It The Certification Or The Knowledge That Matters Most?**

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This is a follow-up to the article, "*What You Need To Know About The PMP,*" that Jeff Furman wrote for *Technical Support's* January 2007 issue.

One of the Core Principles of PMP (licensed **P**roject **M**anagement **P**rofessional, from PMI, the **P**roject **M**anagement **I**nstitute) is **KaiZen**, meaning *continuous improvement*. The term and concept come from Japan, where a lot of such innovations in Project Quality Management were studied in the 60's and brought over to the U.S. and incorporated into the global world of Project Management as we know it today. It's a strategy of constantly revisiting all processes to see if any room for improvement can be found.

In that spirit of ever-striving for increased Quality and Continuous Improvement, we interviewed 4 Senior PMP Project Managers on topics ranging from *...the practicality of the PMBOK (PMI Body of Knowledge) ... to the merits of the PMP Exam process ... to the emphasis on the PMP license versus real-world experience in hiring decisions.*

### **Biographies**



**Henry C. Will IV, PMP** is a Senior Project Manager at IBM managing software development projects for mortgage companies. He is also the founder and leader of [PMLessonsLearned.com](http://PMLessonsLearned.com), a group that is open to all PMs, which enables PMs to help each other in their careers. Mr. Will has worked in IT Solutions Consulting and is named on patents for a Blood Chemistry Analyzer. He has managed software development on such varied projects as Y2K for AT&T, the F/A 18 Fighter plane, the A/V-8B Vertical Take-off and Landing jump jet and video games. His contact information is [www.henrywill4.com](http://www.henrywill4.com).



**Georgina Wood, PMP** is a Senior Manager with over 20 years of Global Pharmaceutical experience in the areas of human and veterinary drug development. She has worked extensively in project and resource management, with strong emphasis in the areas of change management, outsourcing and offshoring. Her education includes a Post Grad Diploma and BSC Hons degree in Computer Science. She was born and raised in England.



**Gary Jin-King, PMP** is currently a Vice President and Senior IT Project Manager working for the Finance Technology area at Wachovia Bank in Charlotte, North Carolina. Before relocating to Charlotte, he was a first Vice President and Senior IT System Manager/Program manager working for Prudential/Wachovia Securities on Wall Street, supporting the Credit Risk/Analysis and Treasury areas. Gary has extensive experience in information management, team building, and designing and optimizing technologies that drive business performance and increase profitability. In addition to his BS in Computer Science, he has an MS in Information Management.



**Dr. Samuel Prasad, PMP** is currently the VP of Engineering at Boonty Inc. where he oversees their worldwide technical activities. He has published several papers and has spoken at many symposiums on knowledge acquisition algorithms used by autonomous mobile robots. His previous experience includes engagements as a senior consultant for over 15 years at many firms in the New York area including Goldman Sachs, Reuters, and the Bank of New York. Sam graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology with a Master's degree in computer engineering and received his Ph.D. degree in computer science from the Stevens Institute of Technology.

**Question #1. What are a couple of the most valuable things you learned as part of studying for your PMP certification that have made a difference in your work/career?**

Henry Will: The principles of Project Management were the most valuable things that I learned while studying for the PMP. One that I use quite often and successfully is the **PMI principal that the people who do the work should also estimate the work**. If people have to work within the confines of someone else's estimate, they don't have ownership and they won't take responsibility to make the goal.

Gary Jin-King: I am a firm believer that great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, issues and doubt, and offer a solution that everybody can understand. Acquired knowledge on the exact PMI Knowledge Areas and Process Groups/Processes that are required enables me to simplify project tasks, and to always keep my "eyes on the prize" to ensure project successes. Also, **the standard project language that PMI adopted** makes all of us understand each other better and faster in the project management world.

Sam Prasad: One, project management is a science, which implies that professional project managers must possess a good understanding of the science. Two, the probability that a project will be completed on time and within budget goes up dramatically if it is managed by a PM who has had prior training in the science of project management.

Gina Wood: The PMI Knowledge Area of Risk Identification/Risk Management is something I try to pay particularly close attention to in every project I am involved in since studying the PMI material. Personally I have found that having the facts about the risks in both a qualitative and quantitative format helps with my confidence to recommend stopping or not even starting a project. A lot of projects progress without these areas being paid enough attention to, and then fail to meet either the objectives, budget, quality and/or time commitments. Since taking the PMP course, I emphasize the areas of assessing risks and benefits to the organization of all of the projects I am involved in.

Also, I have always known that communication with the stakeholders is a vital part of project management, but during the studying of the PMI material and from subsequent reading I am now more aware of the many aspects. Within each project there must be an understanding of the overall stakeholder community and the optimum level of effort to allocate to each stakeholder. A balance between the effort to maintain supportive stakeholders and the effort to minimize the impact of those stakeholders who are not as supportive must be determined in the initiation phase of every project.

**Question #2. For people not familiar with PMI, can you flesh out a couple of cases where you applied PMI principles, and where that made a difference on your project?**

Gary Jin-King: From my study of the vendor selection process (**PMP "Select Sellers" process**) I was much better prepared to let everyone know what roles each member on the team should play, and who should do what in carrying out the tasks.

Henry Will: I did Y2K Program Office work for a major telecommunications organization while studying for the PMP exam. When I started to learn about **Risk Management**, I realized how important it was. So, I started to apply some simple principles to encourage the project teams to share risks. At first they were very slow to suggest risk items, but we were able to identify 2 large risks that later required mitigation plans to be implemented. The first could have caused a very well-known piece of the business to be non-compliant. And the second risk issue opened up a whole segment of technology that was in emergency need of attention. We set up a war room and the cavalry came in and got it done on time!

**Question #3. What are the biggest benefits you personally like best about being a member of PMI?**

Sam Prasad: PMI provides me a forum for interacting and exchanging ideas with my peers. I encourage all members to attend their local chapter meetings. It provides excellent networking opportunities and allows members to discuss real-world issues and possible solutions with their peers.

Henry Will: The people and the support that they give. Most PMI members are very interested in learning how to be better PMs and also are more than happy to help other PMs. Also, the PMLessonsLearned.com group I lead is open to all Project Managers and through it I see Project Managers helping each other all the time.

Gina Wood: The information, training and ideas sharing that is part of the PMI organization and the PMI chapters are invaluable. At these forums I get the chance to learn and enhance my own skills by both listening to the various speakers and also through interaction with other Project Managers from other industries.

**Question #4. Can you give examples of where it might have helped you earlier if you had studied for the PMP sooner?**

Henry Will: Oh boy, can I! I was a Project Manager for about 14 years before even knowing the principles of project management. It would have been very helpful for me to know more about the profession in order to keep the right balance between (and focus on) all of the Knowledge Areas, to understand the processes, and to be more efficient in my PM work.

I worked for a company that did video games a few years ago. With the strong "crunch time" associated with developing video games, **PMP planning skills** could have helped level the hours.

Gary Jin-King: I would certainly have had an easier time when I went through my Master's program in information management. And on projects, I would have had better capability to articulate what needs to be done.

**Question #5. Have you worked in a PMO (Project Management Office) Environment? If so, how have you found that environment for PMs?**

Sam Prasad: Yes, I have. Typically, companies with a PMO are more aware of the need for professional project managers and the correlation between increased project success rates and the use of an effective and standardized project management discipline in the company. Of course, just the presence of a PMO does not guarantee that projects will be completed on time. Ultimately, the success of a PMO depends on the company culture and the way a PMO is organized and used in the company.

Henry Will: Yes, I worked in a Y2K PMO for a Fortune 500 corporation. The environment was great for PMs because Y2K in such a large organization was an event that proved the value of Project Management and the PMO. I also found it was valuable for Project Managers involved with the PMO, because of the ability to share PM knowledge and specific recommendations.

**Question #6. As a PMP, what would you say to the "naysayers" who feel that there is too much emphasis on certifications in today's marketplace?**

Gary Jin-King: Going through the certification makes you understand the art of project management much better than you anticipated. Knowing exactly what you do and how you do it matters when working in the competitive environment that we live in today. It requires everyone doing things better, cheaper, and faster with crisp project execution capability.

Sam Prasad: Certification is important to the extent that it formally acknowledges a person's understanding of best practices and standards used in the industry.

Henry Will: Certification is very important to a Project Manager because of the value of learning how to organize processes and effort to drive a project forward. Every project manager I know who has passed the test, or recertified, has shown a commitment to becoming a better project manager.

**Question #7. Do you find there are areas where the PMP knowledge is not practical, or not in-depth enough, for some real-world situations?**

Gary Jin-King: I believe that the PMP alone does not and will not replace the real life work experience and knowledge that you gained throughout your professional career. The combination of the PMP discipline together with your real life work experience, e.g. as a system or project manager, will prepare you well in the project management world.

Henry Will: Some areas may not apply in certain situations. For example, there may be projects where vendors are not utilized. However, even if someone is working in a Program Office and has responsibility for only one aspect, let's say Risk Management, that doesn't mean they can ignore what's going on in all of the other Knowledge Areas.

Further, I believe that PMP knowledge is not restricted to the PMBOK. All the areas of PMP knowledge can be applied practically, and if the practitioner searches they will find PMP information deep enough for any situation. There are so many books, courses, blogs, podcasts, chapter meetings and other resources that you can find as much information about any knowledge area that one desires.

**Question #8. Which do you prioritize most when you interview a job applicant: certifications or experience?**

Sam Prasad: Experience, but both are important. Experience tells me about the job applicant's track record, while a PMP certification tells me that the applicant has studied the fundamentals and techniques required for good project management. While experience definitely carries a higher priority, certification may become the determining factor in the final decision on who to hire from a pool of equally experienced candidates.

Henry Will: **I think that a history of repeated, verifiable delivery of successful projects is more important than both of these aspects.** Once that determination is made, then I think we will most

likely find that certification is part of the equation that makes that possible. It's important to question any applicant on the details of their certification and experience. How much have they applied their PMP knowledge? How broad and deep is the experience? How much knowledge and experience have they used that is applicable to the position being interviewed for?

**Question #9. In your own case, which has helped you more: the PMP certification or the PMI knowledge?**

Henry Will: My PMP Certification has no doubt helped me win over other applicants in getting a job. However, the PMI knowledge has helped me almost every day!

Gary Jin-King: To me PMI knowledge and PMP certification cannot be mutually exclusive, that is, I studied PMI knowledge for the sake of becoming a PMP. Passing the PMP exam was also a way of verifying for myself that I understood the material thoroughly.

Gina Wood: I have recently changed positions and found that having the PMI Certification on my resume helped me obtain the interviews. People were impressed that I had taken the time to study for this certification even though my experience showed that I could already perform project management activities competently.

Sam Prasad: As more and more companies recognize the importance of project planning and management, a PMP certification is necessary to get you in the door. But once you are in, a good understanding and application of PMBOK to the job and prior experience are usually the main factors that determine a person's success.

**Question #10. If you could speak directly to the leadership of the PMI organization, would you have any suggestions for improvement? Such as, in the way the PMP body of knowledge is tested, or possible changes/additions to the PMP curriculum?**

Gary Jin-King: More case studies, with real life examples and role-playing exercises.

Gina Wood: The material is very structured and somewhat impractical to follow at times. I feel that more practical implementation examples would help with the understanding of the material. These examples would benefit the individuals, if you could also show the differences, where applicable, between the depth of implementation for large versus small projects. Although the actual project management steps will not change, the time investment in some of the steps could extensively change, depending on the product of the project. Also, I found personally that studying the PMP material with a group was more beneficial to me in the practical sense.

Henry Will: **If I would suggest anything, it would be that more information would be included in the PMBOK about "soft skills." The PMBOK deals mostly with "hard skills" like calculations, scheduling and such. Soft Skills are those skills that management values the most because of their importance in organizations.** They include leadership, trustworthiness, integrity, accountability, coaching, intuition, listening, negotiating, decision making, and other such skills. Increasingly more

project managers are interested in learning the soft skills. Most of the topics we cover in our monthly PMLessonsLearned conference calls are in the soft skills areas.

## **Conclusion**

One of the things that makes PMI a great organization and keeps it great is that there are a number of channels for members to give their input ("KaiZen"). These include volunteering on PMI committees and pilot programs, which can be rewarding in themselves, and can also be excellent experiences for learning and for networking.

*NaSPA member Jeff Furman, PMP, has more than 15 years' experience as a manager of IT infrastructure software, and has led change/release management teams, development support groups and many IT projects. He has also been a Trainer and Course Developer, and has taught many hands-on classes for application programmers on development and testing tools, as well as PMP Prep, which he is currently teaching for NetCom Information Technology. He has written several articles for NaSPA/Technical Support magazine, as well as articles for other industry publications, newspapers and magazines. His contact information is [www.Jeff-Furman.com](http://www.Jeff-Furman.com), [FurmanJeff@aol.com](mailto:FurmanJeff@aol.com).*