

2003 Excellent in Practice Award

Career Development
Organizational Learning
Workplace Learning & Development



Hewlett-Packard Company/HP Services

Littleton, Massachusetts

Project Management University

SUMMARY

Problem

In late 1997, it was clear that we needed to:

- standardize project management practices and procedures worldwide
- reduce the number of troubled projects,
- improve project on time, on budget performance, and
- increase project margins.

We particularly needed more practical and effective training for areas such as Asia Pacific, where a limited number of project managers are spread across an expansive geographic area.

Practice

Project Management University, (PMU), is an intensive weeklong development program that provides:

- delivery of key business messages related to project management
- the opportunity for networking with peers
- training on core and company specific project management practices
- guidance and support in preparing for PMP certification, and
- recognition of their importance to the business.

Results

The PMU has helped to develop a project management community in the company. In 1998, the first PMU was held in Singapore and then success spread to North America and Europe. Since 1998 we have held twenty-two PMUs through 2003. There are 5 more planned for 2004. Some business results to which PMU contributed:

- 70% of projects run at or better than budget (compared to industry average of 50%).
- Project margins have increased up to 50%.
- We are able to relocate and/or reassign project managers to our various global offices more easily due to our consistent methods.

BACKGROUND

Description: This intensive, week long, development program is a blend of presentations, coursework and networking opportunities. It is presented in Asia, North America and Europe, once or twice a year. All presenters are required to address their topic as it relates to project management. A sample agenda includes:

- Sunday evening - Registration, reception, welcome from senior manager, dinner
- Monday morning - Presentations by senior managers regarding the value of project management to the business, Key PMO initiatives, PMP certification and industry speakers
- Monday afternoon, Tuesday, Wednesday morning and Thursday - Participants attend one course from the four to six offered
- Wednesday afternoons - network development activities
- Evenings - Project experience/lessons learned workshops
- Friday morning - Presentations from evening workshops, a “final exam” and review of the week in a game show format, “Go forth and Conquer” talk by a senior manager, and graduation
- Inspirational videos on topics such as leadership and teamwork are interspersed throughout the week.

The strong, balanced planning team differentiates PMU from other, similar practices. The Worldwide PM Competency & Certification Director from the business and the Worldwide Training Manager are consultants on all the PMU planning teams, conveying lessons learned from one PMU to the next, and throughout the organization. The PMO manager from the hosting region leads all planning. This combination of people provides a well-balanced planning team and ensures that the event is relevant and business-focused and the results are appreciated across the organization.

Objectives: The objectives of the PMU are to:

- Provide training on core and company specific project management
- Deliver key business messages related to project management
- Create opportunity for project managers to network with their peers
- Promote and encourage PMP certification
- Demonstrate the importance of project managers to the business
- Have fun

These were the original objectives established in 1998 and remain our goals today. All topics presented during the week must support one of these goals. While we do make content changes at each PMU, the overall structure remains the same.

Audience: The primary audience for the PMU are the project managers who manage external customer projects in each geographic region. 75-150 project managers attend each PMU. (4% of the project managers in our organization attend each PMU.)

Resources: The number and level of resources involved to plan and execute a PMU vary over the life of the project, as reflected in the table on the next page.

Resources	Needs Assessment	Design	Delivery	Evaluation
PMO Manager	X	X	X	
PM Competency Director	X	X	X	
Training manager	X	X	X	X
Registration		X	X	
Logistics		X	X	
Administration		X	X	
Technical Support			X	

Costs: Costs vary by region. The average is \$1250 per person for the 5 days of training. The overall cost for the twenty-two PMUs delivered for 2200 project managers are US\$2.75M. The PMUs have been very valuable and are expected to continue as a key component of our Project Management Development Program. PMU is a community-building event based on a core curriculum. PMU provides a unique opportunity for PMO managers and project managers to meet face to face, in an increasingly virtual environment. It gives project managers, who often sit at customer sites, an opportunity to network with other project managers.

Learning Philosophy: PMU focuses on interactive training with case studies and small group discussion. There is limited use of overhead presentations to the large group. Those that are used are designed to be as interactive as possible. Project managers are critical to the success of our business. Everything at PMU is to demonstrate the value of our project managers.

DOCUMENTATION

Needs Identification

1. *Describe the problem or need for which this practice is designed and implemented. How was this problem identified, and how was it determined that this practice is an appropriate response?*

In the mid-1990s, the business of project managers on customer projects was facing a number of problems:

- Difficulties in bringing projects in on time, on budget and with acceptable quality
- Inconsistent business practices and training programs
- Minimal knowledge sharing and networking among the project managers

With the formation of the Worldwide Project Management Office, (PMO), consistent project management policies and procedures were implemented and tracked worldwide. To help

reduce the number of problem projects and to promote consistent business practices, one worldwide training curriculum was established and implemented.

Project management training in the 20 countries of Asia Pacific was difficult to plan because there are relatively few project managers in any one location. The worldwide curriculum was in place, but the Asia Pacific countries had difficulty in meeting the minimum class size of 15. There was minimal knowledge sharing and networking among the project managers because project managers often worked at customer sites, with little interaction with each other.

In late 1997, managers from the business, from the Worldwide Project Management Office and from the Training and Development organization met to discuss how to make the Project Management Development Program more effective for Asia Pacific. Because of the limited number of project managers in one location and the expansive area covered, a practical and economical approach was needed to provide training. The Project Management University (PMU) was designed to address these problems as well as to promote consistent business practices and to provide an opportunity for project manager networking, experience sharing, and team building.

Very positive Level 1 evaluations by the participants and the business suggested that the PMU was addressing the perceived needs of the business. PMU was so effective in Asia that it was then implemented in North America and Europe.

Design Values

2. *Please describe how this practice takes into account the best interests of both the organization and the employees targeted.*

In 1998, the PMU objectives were carefully constructed to focus on the interests of both the organization and the project managers. They remain our objectives today. They are:

Objective 1: Provide training on core and company specific project management

We deliver a selection of four or five 3-day courses from our project management curriculum. The business decides which courses to offer based on the needs of the organization at the time. Each participant chooses one course track to attend during the week. This is in the best interests of the organization, as it offers the courses that are most needed by the business. Project managers' best interests are considered as they are given a selection of four or five courses to choose from.

Objective 2: Deliver key business messages related to project management

We invite senior business managers and industry leaders to speak on project management topics, such as "Project Managers as Business Managers", "Project Teaming" and "Managing Complex Projects". We also have presentations about worldwide and local Project Management Office (PMO) initiatives. This is the organization's opportunity to communicate key business messages that are in the best interests of the organization.

Having project managers understand these key messages will help them do a better job as project managers. This is in the best interests of the project managers.

Objective 3: Create opportunity for project managers to network with their peers

One aspect of the PMU most valued by the participants is the informal and formal networking. Networking at the PMU is essential to keeping project managers energized and engaged.

Networking has become even more important with the growing virtual environment in which people work. PMU provides an opportunity not only for the project managers to meet with each other, but also for the business and PMO managers to meet. Energized, engaged project managers serve the organization more effectively. In this way, Networking meets the needs of both the organization and the participants.

The casual, informal atmosphere of the PMU lends itself to networking. Mealtimes are kept free of speakers and people are encouraged to network over lunch and during breaks. On the formal side, we have an opening icebreaker activity that encourages people to meet each other. We assign people to different teams throughout the week to get them to know as many participants as possible. Evening workshops focus on project managers sharing their experiences. We also have specific network development activities.

Objective 4: Promote and encourage PMP certification

It is a competitive advantage to the business organization to have well-trained, highly skilled, PMP certified project managers, and therefore an asset to the career of each project manager to be PMP certified. Project Management Professional (PMP) is the internationally recognized project management certification required by more and more of our customers.

Throughout the PMU, we recognize our Project Management Professionals (PMPs) by introducing them in the opening session, posting their names on the PMU Message Board, and using a PMP ribbon on their name badges.

At every PMU we deliver a presentation on the importance of certification and company resources to help people attain the certification. PMP certification helps develop PM skills and makes the PMs more marketable. Certification benefits the organization because increasingly customers are requiring certified project managers. Our success in winning and delivering customer engagements is enhanced because an increasingly large number of our project managers are certified.

Objective 5: Demonstrate the importance of project managers to the business

We have worldwide and regional vice presidents discuss the importance of project management to the business and the value of project managers. The atmosphere created by a premier venue reinforces the importance of project managers. Having project managers feel valued leads to greater PM satisfaction, which leads to greater organizational effectiveness.

Objective 6: Have fun

And finally, we have fun. Having fun balances the intensity of the course work and presentations at the PMU. We build fun throughout the week, with Thursdays being Wacky Shirt Day and prizes awarded in the evening and culminating on Friday with Campus Challenge, a game show format with the PMO managers as a panel of judges ruling on questionable answers. People having fun are more productive and have a more positive effect on the organization.

Alignment

3. *How is this practice in alignment with the performance identified, as described in your answer to question 1?*

Alignment with performance. PMU has helped to reduce the difficulties in bringing projects in on time, on budget and with acceptable quality by offering courses such as, Risk Management and Contract Management. PMU has helped reduce inconsistent business practices by offering a course on the project management methodology of the organization. According to the feedback received from the participants, PMU has increased the knowledge sharing and networking among the project managers through the many networking opportunities at PMU. These results are all directly aligned with the key goals of the business stated earlier.

Integration with other training and practices. PMU is a special development program that provides a way to deliver 4 to 6 courses from our 35-course project management curriculum, as well as networking activities and management speakers to project managers worldwide.

PMU is targeted to an audience of 3,00 project managers (approximately 5% of the total 65,000 organization staff). It makes use of both internal and external courses from the PM curriculum.

The PMU has been crucial to employee retention and increased motivation by offering career development opportunities and by providing

- access to academic credit for further study, and
- preparation for the most sought-after and recognized industry standard certification – the PMP.

The PMU supports the organization's goals of consistency in project management practices, increasingly effective project managers, and a reduced number of problem projects by providing participants with genuine recognition of their skills and importance to the company, and access to

- each other
- high level management and the latest corporate messages, and
- the latest industry and professional skills and information.

Project management in our company is integrated across the organization in a variety of ways. A project manager is required to act as a business leader and to work closely with our sales team to identify and win business. The project manager must be able to assess the economic and technical feasibility of completing a project. This requires substantial knowledge of our business, our economic model, the competition and the overall marketplace. Access to this type of information is integrated into the PMU offerings .

Partnerships.

Planning partnerships include a well-balanced planning team that ensures the event is relevant and business-focused. The team often includes:

- senior managers
- worldwide and regional PMOs
- workforce development management
- a project management training partner
- conference center management
- industry speakers

In general, the Worldwide PMO PM Competency Director and the Worldwide PM Training and Development Manager provide guidelines, tools and templates to help the planning. The planning is lead by a PMO manager from the hosting region. The PMO manager hosts the event, and is often the master of ceremonies throughout the week. The training organization provides instructional design leadership as well as registration and logistics support.

Implementation partnerships include a blend of industry speakers, senior management speakers, and simultaneous courses by world-class instructors along with evening workshops on knowledge sharing, networking. The industry speakers discuss project management best practices and bring an external point of view to the PMU. The management speakers present the key internal business messages.

Training partnerships. Courses from the core curriculum run worldwide throughout the year. Four or five are selected to be presented at the PMU, depending on the critical need at the time. Project managers select one course to attend during the PMU. In the evening, there are knowledge sharing workshops. Selected project managers present their projects or project managers share lessons learned on a given topic, such as risk management or change control. All of this aligns with the organizational goals to promote consistency in project management practices, to make project managers more effective in their work and to reduce the number of problem projects.

Our project management training partner, who has a worldwide reputation for excellence, delivers some of the courses taught at PMU. This vendor may also supply the industry speaker for the PMU. Internal subject matter experts deliver other courses. This gives the participants the opportunity to question the experts in the organization.

These partnerships are critical to the success of the PMU.

Evaluation Strategy

6. *How is this practice evaluated? What factors are included in your calculations (e.g. time, costs, staff count, lost phone calls, customer satisfaction)? Are the financial costs of this practice calculated? If so, how? How often is this practice evaluated?*

The planning team, the participants and the business continuously evaluate the PMUs, using a variety of proven techniques and procedures. For example, we use

- certification tracking
- observational and anecdotal information and feedback from participants
- Kirkpatrick Level 1 evaluation: reaction to training
- Kirkpatrick Level 2 evaluation: knowledge transfer
- Kirkpatrick Level 3 evaluation: business impact
- project reviews

Certification tracking. One of the key PMU objectives is the promotion of PMP certification. In 1997 we had 6 PMP certified project managers. We have grown to over 1500 today.

Observational evaluation. During the PMU, at the end of each day, the planning team meets to evaluate the day, to discuss what went well and what needs improvement, to plan for the next day and to identify potential risks and how to address them. Evaluation comments would include whether a new networking activity met the objectives or whether a speaker met the objectives. Throughout the PMU week, the planning team members capture lessons learned informally. Notes from these meetings feed into a Lessons Learned document, which is reviewed at the start of planning the next PMU.

Level 1 evaluation. To evaluate the PMU as a whole, we began by administering a Level 1 evaluation at the end of each PMU. Participants rate the training process and training impact, indicating best components, suggestions for improvement, and topics for future PMUs. We have a 95%+ return rate on the evaluations with 100% of participants giving an overall rating of 4 or 5 out of 5 (with 5 being excellent).

Participants have been very generous with their comments, some of which are included here: *Attending the PMU was a great personal and professional experience The training exceeded my expectations. This was great. Great courses, fun activities, excellent networking, excellent information. Great program...I met a bunch of great peers from around the (region).*

Participants also rate each course and each speaker individually for presentation quality and value of the content. Early in the planning of a PMU, the planning team reviews the evaluation results and lessons learned from the previous PMU. The information collected is then analyzed and used to improve direction and focus of the components of the PMU.

Level 2 evaluation. Our Level 2 evaluation consists of a 25-question, multiple-choice examination administered to each student at the end of each course. Students must achieve a score of 70 percent on this exam, in addition to other criteria, to successfully complete the course. The exams have been evaluated to ensure that they test course content presented in the class, for racial, ethnic, and gender bias, as well as readability of instructions and test questions.

Level 3 evaluation. We are beginning to incorporate a Kirkpatrick Level 3 assessment results of the business impact of the courses taught at PMU (as well as in regularly scheduled offerings) into our evaluation process. (**Note:** This assessment is not focused specifically on the PMU presentation of these courses, but assess course effectiveness generally, wherever they are held.) Online surveys and follow-up interviews are conducted to assess how frequently the student applies the principles and techniques learned in the course, and the impact on projects managed. Response rate has been about 65%. Results suggest that 64% - 71% of the participants who took these courses are applying, in their work environment, the skills and knowledge taught.

Project reviews. In addition to the Kirkpatrick methods, we have long been evaluating the overall impact of our practice through comprehensive and formal project reviews. We conduct multiple levels of reviews throughout our four regions on a regular basis. Projects are reviewed at the country, region, and world-wide levels. We review the overall status of the project, customer satisfaction, financial status, schedule and technical performance, resources, and contract compliance.

Since the PMU was begun, overall identification and management of “at risk” projects has improved. For delivering projects on time and on budget, the company now has an average that is significantly better than the industry average.

Management support shows the efficacy of the PMU and the importance it has in the organization. Senior managers evaluate each PMU and they approve event costs. The PMU is scheduled for once or twice a year in each region. In spite of recent difficult economic times and with various training cutbacks, since 1998, the PMU has continued to have very strong senior management support.

Results

7. *What specific participant behaviors are observed as a result of this practice, and how do these behaviors contribute to the goals of the practice? Are the impacts of these behaviors short-term or long-term? How do these behaviors differ from the results of previous practices?*

Specific behaviors/organizational effects observed. Based on multiple evaluation results, we have determined that this practice has had the following effects on the behavior of the participants and as a result, on the organization:

- The number of PMP certified project managers has increased substantially.

- More project managers have a better command of risk management practices.
- More projects are now being delivered on time and within budget, and with improved project margins.
- Morale has increased among project managers and there is an increased retention of staff. Project managers now have a genuine sense of community within the company
- The organization is now able to move project managers to our various global offices more easily due to our consistent methods adopted world wide and supported by PMU.

More PMP certified project managers. Since PMU we have observed a substantial increase in our project managers' interest in furthering their professional development, including the attainment of PMP certification. Since 1997, we have grown from 6 to over 1500 PMP certified project managers. Prior to PMU, there was no focus on or forum for discussion of the importance of PMP certification. PMU now provides that and is an inspiration for people to get their certification. Our organization works actively to support PMU in evoking enduring, long-term change. To maintain their certification, project managers must continue to increase their knowledge of project management by attending project management courses or presentations. PMU helps those already certified maintain that certification. The organization now has more certified PMs to meet customer requirements. This has long term effects as the company makes known its number of PMPs and has more certified project managers to meet customer requirements and wins more and more customers.

Increased risk management expertise. Each month, customer projects are evaluated and assigned a status in each of the following areas:

- Customer satisfaction
- Financial
- Legal
- Schedule
- Resources
- Technical Performance

The Risk Management course is a required course and is delivered at nearly every PMU. Management observations, anecdotal feedback, and project reviews, suggest that project managers now identify risks earlier in the project and manage them in a more consistent, methodical ways. A discussion of the risk management of a project is part of every project review. Our Worldwide Engagement Project Management Office Staff has also witnessed a heightened understanding and more sophisticated use of risk management techniques and greater knowledge of the financial implications of project performance. A member of a project review team wrote, " (Our) Singapore (business group) specifically called out the project management training, especially on finance and risk, as helping to improve predictability. Six months ago, no project manager could present project financials—while today, all project managers are capable and comfortable in doing so. The training has helped them to move from a role of project leaders to project managers."

Our Worldwide Project Management Office tracks project success and confirms that since the practice was implemented, we now experience “improved predictability, increased ability to identify and manage risks, and increased awareness of contract management and control of schedules and costs.” At the regional level, the manager of the Project Management Office for Asia-Pacific stated—

“In Asia-Pacific there are many countries, languages, cultures, customs and different ways of doing business but project managers are united by their role. More and more (of our organization’s) projects are completing on or before scheduled date and within baseline budget and achieving customer satisfaction.”

On time and within budget delivery and improved project margins. These and other project data are tracked monthly and if certain thresholds are reached, special scrutiny is applied. The PMU has been a very influential forum for discussing these organization expectations and results. At the present time 70% of projects running at or better than budget (compared to industry average of 50%), and project margin improvement of up to 50%.

The participants in the program have a new confidence in their abilities to perform complex project activities, as evidenced by project managers taking over troubled projects. And, because our project managers are now using a consistent approach to project management, assuming control of a troubled project in midstream is less of a problem than in the past where such a leadership substitution often resulted in lengthy delays and disruptions. In the short term, projects in distress are being handled more effectively with improved customer satisfaction. In the long term, there are fewer projects in distress. The Project Management University is a major factor for this improvement along with improved methodology, tools, and opportunity selection.

Improved morale and staff retention. A very important effect of PMU is a renewed enthusiasm in our project management staff. This manifests itself in many ways, the most notable being in increased employee retention and motivation. An example: one potential employee who had interviewed with our two primary competitors, chose to work in our organization because our practice demonstrated our organization's strong commitment to project managers. Our commitment to career development has given us a long-term advantage in hiring and retaining highly qualified project managers. For example, in an industry experiencing a 25 percent turnover rate, our turnover rate is 10 percent year over year. This decrease saves us hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly on recruiting, orientation, and training expenses.

Putting numbers aside for the moment, we have seen the benefits of this practice in less tangible ways as well. For example, our project managers feel very much a part of a professional community of practice. Our entire organization has undergone a substantial transformation whereby we have oriented our processes and procedures around projects, thus elevating the status of the project manager both internally and externally. Being a project manager in our organization is a position to which one aspires, and in which one can reap substantial professional and financial rewards.

Project management community. PMU fosters a strong project management community. In a growing virtual environment, PMU provides an opportunity for PMO managers and project managers to meet together, often the only place they meet face-to-face. It gives project managers, who often sit at customer sites, an opportunity to network with other project managers. As a result of the networking at PMU, there is greater communication and knowledge sharing. People have a larger network to draw upon to problem solve. This has short term and long term effects, short term in that people have established contacts to discuss their current project issues, but also long term in that the contacts and knowledge sharing increase over time.

More fluid organization. Conversations with business management suggests that the organization is now able to move project managers to our various global offices more easily due to our consistent methods. This is of tremendous benefit to the organization.

High level management support. Continued long-term results are highly dependent on the organization's commitment to lasting change. Our executive has that commitment and it is expressed in the continued funding of our comprehensive training programs, the PMU and support for the attainment of the PMP.

Shared Learning

9. *What have been some of the specific lessons learned from designing and implementing this practice for the purposes of continuous internal improvement? Please discuss whether and how this practice might be transferred and replicated both internally and externally to your organization.*

Specific lessons learned.

Within our organization this practice is being emulated by the Solution Architect group who are developing a Solution Architect university, and the Corporate IT group who are now starting a PMU of their own.

Our experience with PMU has either suggested or validated the following words of wisdom:

- Interactive training rather than lecture-oriented presentations is much more effective for this type of training.
- It is important to have professional instructors deliver training. The credibility and expertise of the instructor are important to this audience.
- The competitive game show format used for wrap up is especially effective and well liked. This audience is competitive, active and outgoing. This approach supports that style very effectively.
- All additions to the agenda must comply with the PMU goals.
- We found that presentation topics must be, current and relevant to participants, to be highly valued by the audience.
- Demonstrating to PMs how important they are is crucial to morale, motivation and ultimately performance. This is one of the most effective aspects of PMU.

- We learned that it is important to hold PMU in a premier venue since it is for premier people. We have found that a conference center works best to convey the message that we are in a learning environment. Also we have found that a location away from the distractions of a city center works best.
- Attention to detail and risk management is crucial in staging a PMU.
- For effective networking, the name badges should be readable from as far as 5 feet away.
- The structure of the PMU remains the same, with the presentations and courses changing. Keeping the same structure allows the focus to be on content.
- We plan to incorporate more Level 3 evaluation techniques on other components of PMUs in the future.

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