

# Developing Future Program Leaders: Part 3

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In Part 1 of this series, I explained that organizations need to capture the expertise of an aging, highly skilled workforce and to develop the next generation of program leaders. I detailed the importance from both an organizational and employee perspective in terms of increased efficiency and individual engagement; introduced a process to facilitate understanding of the program manager role; and defined competencies, a key to understanding any role as well as any development effort. Part 2 explained the challenges faced when defining program management, as well as the process for creating a complete understanding of the program manager using a “success profile” structure with the required competencies. In this third and final part, I shall explore the alternatives available to create a PM development program.

## Creating a Program Manager Development Program

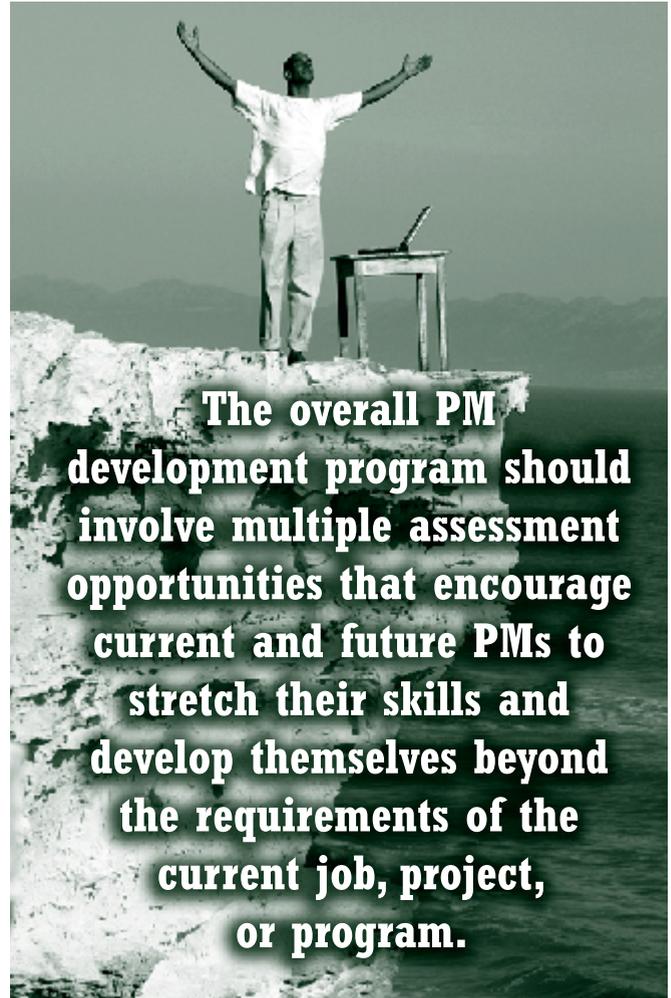
Once the competencies, success profile, and proficiency levels have been specified for PMs, training programs and experiential assignments need to be created or reviewed against those requirements. The training programs and developmental assignments need to be organized into a long-term developmental process. The overall PM development program should involve multiple assessment opportunities that encourage current and future PMs to stretch their skills and develop themselves beyond the requirements of the current job, project, or program. This encompasses not only those employees most likely to be promoted, but also those who are inclined to work on improving themselves and their overall level of professionalism upon completing the developmental process.

Training programs should be analyzed in terms of the competencies they develop and the depth and breadth of capability participants are expected to have attained by the conclusion of the training. In addition, the training programs should be designed to teach the competencies in the context of the challenges faced by PMs.

Experiential assignments should be designed to encourage the development of the same critical competencies.

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The experiential assignments can include coaching, mentoring, or special team or project work. Because these assignments are often highly customized for individuals, development objectives should be concrete and explicitly communicated to coaches and mentors as well as to those being coached or mentored. The more specific the development objectives, the more likely that individuals will be able to create development plans linked to achieving them.

Since experiential assignments for the PM roles are likely to be organization- and employee-specific, they can't be examined in a general article; however, I shall discuss several component parts for structured PM training and development programs, including assessment centers;

## **UPDATE: Systems Engineering and Earned Value Management Support for Performance-Based Awards**

*Paul J. Solomon*

This addendum updates information in an article published in *Defense AT&L*, January-February 2007. The previous article showed how Systems Engineering standards and Earned Value Management provide a framework for linking award fees to desired program outcomes in accordance with Department of Defense directives. However, that article did not include the recently published *Guide for Integrating Systems Engineering into DoD Acquisition Contracts*.

The guidance is now organized into the following topics:

- Technical reviews
- Integrated plans
- Technical Performance Measures
- Technical Baselines
- Integrated Baseline Review
- Award Fee

An updated summary of the DoD policy and guides, as well as the pertinent section of the DoD Appropriations Act of 2007 are presented in tabular form at <[www.PB-EV.com](http://www.PB-EV.com)>. At PBEV Resources, you will also find links to previous articles.

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blended learning; coaching programs; 360-degree feedback; and online talent development systems.

### **Assessment Centers**

In this instance, the term “assessment center” refers to a specific approach to evaluate the competencies of PMs, including both technical project management skills and leadership capabilities. The distinctive features of assessment centers include multiple assessment techniques; multiple trained raters; ratings based on observed behavior; assessment of individuals as they interact with others in group exercises; and use of simulations that reflect actual job situations or, in the case of PMs, “multiple days in the life of a large-scale program.”

Assessment centers that are designed for development rather than selection emphasize both assessment and long-term development coaching, typically consisting of a one- or two-day process intended for six to 10 participants. The assessment center should assess competencies of both new and experienced PMs. State-of-the-art assessment centers integrate all of these elements using technology to administer and create realistic simulations.

Given that assessment centers are expensive to develop and administer, attendance should be considered a capstone experience for individuals who have first gone through a series of learning experiences. The assessment center should also be one of the individual's last learning exercises centering on the PM competencies before or very shortly after he or she becomes a PM of significant programs.

### **Blended Learning**

The term “blended learning” is intended to describe a solution that combines several different delivery methods, such as independent study, technology-based simulations, and instructor-led learning. The emphasis is on individual learning rather than assessment, in an event intended for a large group (of, for example, 20 to 30 participants). These events contain case studies that expose the learner to program- and project-management competencies, tools, and techniques. The participants react to real-life program challenges and risks, both individually and as teams. They then share their learning experiences with one another.

There is a range of costs for this approach. They will depend on such variables as the length of the course (ranging, for example, from one hour to several days); the complexity of the simulation (paper-based versus computer-based role-playing simulations); and the degree to which the content needs to reflect the specifics of an organization (a generic case-study versus an organization-based, fully researched case study). However, these costs are to some degree mitigated by the large number of individuals who can receive the training. Because the depth of knowledge being imparted can vary from introductory to advanced, the blended-learning approach can be used several times with different content in a PM development program.

Assessment centers and blended learning provide organizations with the opportunity to assess PM competencies in simulated work situations. These methodologies furnish richer, more contextually based feedback to both the organization and the program participants; they help participants pinpoint their most critical development areas, and they help organizations determine what additional individualized development programs or experiences are most needed—mentoring or assignments to special programs or initiatives, for example.

### **Coaching Programs**

For the purpose of this article, coaching programs facilitate mutually designed, beneficial relationships between a professional coach and a high-potential new project manager or program manager and the organization. The coaching relationship is created to benefit the employee who is (or is on track to be) accountable for highly complex programs. The focus of the coaching is on organi-

zational performance and individual learning and development, using leadership competencies and project management skills as additional concentrations. The process of coaching involves gathering information on performance from multiple sources to help identify and act on improvement needs, clarifying and objectifying difficult issues, capitalizing on strengths, and providing hands-on advice. For a PM coaching program to be successful, the coaches should be individuals with extensive program management or senior leadership experiences, as they can offer informal career suggestions as well as practices based on personal experience.

Coaching programs have a range of costs, depending on such variables as the use of internal versus external coaches, the number of coaches and participants, and the frequency and length of meetings. This approach is best used for high-potential employees who need specific in-situation feedback, rather than for turning around poor performers.

### **360-Degree Feedback**

360-degree feedback is a competency-based assessment method that includes a self-assessment by the project/program manager; and feedback from his/her peers, superiors, subordinates, and—potentially—customers. The results of these confidential surveys are tabulated and shared with the employee, usually in a debriefing session conducted by a more senior manager, coach, or human resources professional, who interprets and discusses the results, trends, and themes in terms of relative strengths and development needs.

360-degree feedback programs are generally cost-efficient development tools. Once the initial assessment instrument has been created (based on the behaviors in the PM competencies), the process can be automated and administered as many times as is appropriate during the long-term developmental process. Costs can be reduced either by using instructor-led sessions to introduce the elements of the feedback to a larger number of participants, or through e-learning tools that cover the same material. This approach can be used effectively for individuals who are interested in developing into PMs or to enhance the competencies of existing PMs.

### **Program Manager E-resource Guides**

PM e-resource guides are online systems that allow users to view resources (books, articles, Web sites, courses, etc.) related to PM competencies. The individual is assessed against the competencies through a self-diagnosis and/or 360-degree feedback. The e-resource guides help individuals create development plans linked to organizational goals and objectives; provide just-in-time development tools/resources; ensure development resources are available anytime and anywhere; ensure development resources accommodate different learning styles; and en-

able the organization to track each PM's ongoing development efforts.

E-resource guides are cost-efficient development tools. The self-assessment process (using the PM competencies) can be used if the organization does not make use of 360-degree feedback. Quality e-resource guides are frequently updated and customized to address the latest trends in the profession and industry. The resources contained within the system should be varied to address the needs of both novice and more senior PMs, so that once in place, the e-resource guide can be used continuously throughout the PM development process. This approach can be used effectively for all individuals who are interested in developing into PMs or who are interested in enhancing their competencies.

### **Providing Feedback to All Participants**

The best-designed organization-wide developmental process will achieve optimal impact on the organization's ability to fill program management positions if feedback is provided to all participants *throughout* the process. The type of feedback provided should—and will—vary, depending on how much the individual participates in the developmental process; as the PM progresses, the depth and complexity of the feedback should increase. In addition, time should be allotted to provide one-on-one debriefings and/or career development sessions with those individuals who request them. This is in the best interest of the organization; the sessions can focus PMs on ways to address development issues and raise the overall benchmark strength of the organization.

To further ensure viable candidates for future PM position openings, funding should be set aside for the continued development of those candidates who make it to the end of the developmental process, regardless of whether or not they are selected for an open PM position (or in those instances when an opening may not occur for an extended period of time). These individuals possess the drive, ambition, capability, and desire to move up to leadership positions within the organization.

Organizations will face an increase in the number of PM openings as the workforce ages and reaches retirement. Organizations that want to create a viable internal candidate pool to fill PM vacancies should create a long-term PM development program. By creating PM success profiles with competencies, the organization can develop programs to specifically target both individual and organizational strengths and developmental gaps.

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