

# Career Paths in Action

## **Microsoft**® Microsoft Services Improves Retention with a Career Path for Project Managers

Project Management Institute (PMI) has introduced its career framework, a formal career path for the project management profession. This initiative was launched to help organizations of all types establish clear job expectations, opportunities for development and a means for project management practitioners to advance in the profession. As a part of this effort, we have sought out interesting examples of major organizations that have acknowledged this need, wrestled with the issue of designing a career path for project professionals, and have succeeded at creating their own approach.

### THE STORY OF MICROSOFT SERVICES' EXPERIENCE IS ONE OF THESE GREAT EXAMPLES.

A division of Microsoft Corporation, Microsoft Services employs 15,000 people and focuses on the rapid deployment and productive use of Microsoft technology worldwide. This division is responsible for approximately 11,000 projects per year.

### > PROJECT BACKGROUND

While Microsoft Services had always considered project management important to project success, there was no clear mechanism for tracking and developing project management competencies. A consultant working to help Microsoft clients implement software systems, for example, might work up to the level of “team lead” and then have nowhere to go with his or her career in project management. The only option was to continue down a technical path. *Many people either left the project management profession or left the company.*

It was clear that this situation did not reflect best practices in talent management. Designing a specific career path for project managers became a high priority.

The Microsoft Services Project Management Assessment and Credentialing (PMAC) Program was launched in 2003 to provide the organization with a clearly defined career path for project managers. This program was developed over a two-year period by Christian Jensen, PMP, then the head of Microsoft Services Project Management Office, with support and collaboration from Microsoft's human resources group and PMI's John Roecker, Ed.D.

Development required a total budget expenditure of approximately \$200,000.00 (US). This included establishing the processes, achieving a state of readiness and writing the whitepaper explaining the program. The program operation cost is about \$600.00 (US) per person.

# Paths to Success

## > CHALLENGES

To keep project managers feeling valued and fairly compensated and to preserve and grow the company's investment in project management, the program team needed to design a system that would give project managers a clear, progressive path for developing their capabilities and their careers over the long term. Some specific needs they set out to address included:

- A formal PM career path in alignment with the industry
- A scalable model for PM competencies
- A means to measure demonstrated proficiency in project management
- A connection between PM development and company strategy

It was a significant undertaking, requiring the identification and description of roles and responsibilities at each level; designing appropriate instruments and processes to assess competencies and performance; and building a project management culture in which certification was seen as central not only to career development but improved client service.

“The relationship between PMI and Microsoft has focused on resources that validate our career path and the sharing of ideas and professional dialogue to ensure that our own project management community speaks with one voice.”

-Christian Jensen, PMP

## > PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

**Project Management Career Path.** Fundamental to the program was the development and clarification of the four levels of project manager positions.

*“Each job description level in a career path,”* Dr. Roecker explained, *“needs to define in some way the requirements for experience, credentials and demonstrated core competencies which the individual must meet or exceed to advance to that level.”*

To establish these requirements the Microsoft Services' team conducted industry research, examined global job postings and observed other organizational models.

**Credentialing and Assessment.** Essential to the placement and promotion of project managers within the career path, were the elements of credentialing and assessment. The Microsoft career path requires all project managers to obtain professional certification. In addition, individuals must complete an assessment of their professional competencies. The four-part assessment includes:

- a **business profile**, a measure of project management skills in relation to job requirements;
- a **skills profile**, a self-assessment of project management skills;
- a **readiness profile** or the variance between the business profile and the skills profile; and
- a **proficiency interview** designed to validate the three competency profiles.

## > THE RESULTS

**In a presentation at PMI Global Congress 2006—North America, Mr. Jensen itemized the positive impacts of their program.**

At the individual level, he cited:

- alignment to industry standards,
- globally recognized credentialed individuals,
- defined career road maps and
- proper compensation.

At the organization level, he cited:

- improvements in recruitment and retention,
- accurate capacity planning,
- optimal readiness planning,
- predictable services delivery and
- enabling of services revenue growth.

Surveys conducted at Microsoft development events and in an organization-wide poll show improvement across many talent management indices including:

- Lower employee attrition;
- Higher employee job satisfaction;
- Improved organization and workgroup health indices;
- Increased satisfaction in customer and partner experience.

Several individuals surveyed specifically indicated they had remained with the company because of the clearly defined project management career path aligned with structured development activities.

## > CONCLUSION

In an increasingly competitive global business environment, an organization's ability to attract, develop, retain and effectively deploy talented individuals is a key to the attainment of strategic objectives.

Microsoft Services now has a strategic grasp of its global project management capacity and the year-over-year growth of that capacity. It knows exactly where all its project and program managers and their capabilities fit within the organization; the system enables them to hand pick the right people across regions for a given project.

Microsoft's initiative to standardize and strengthen its definition of project management roles, to support project professionals in their career growth and to optimize the use of project management talent across its global community is a stellar example of the value of such endeavors to individuals and organizations alike.

The results seen at Microsoft Services helped illuminate a profession-wide need. Shortly after the program's completion, Dr. Roecker began formalizing PMI's career framework. Career framework was launched on behalf of the many organizations that would never have the resources of a Microsoft to develop their own project management career path from the ground up.

**Microsoft®**

## PMI'S CAREER FRAMEWORK

PathPro™, the latest entry to PMI's talent development plan for organizations, serves as the blueprint for successful human resource integration at the project-oriented company.

With this valuable tool, PMI provides organizations:

- A formal career path for their project management professionals;
- The guidance necessary to introduce advanced level project positions, including program and portfolio manager;
- Professionally accepted baseline job descriptions that can be customized to reflect the unique nature of an organization; and
- A means to assess the skill-set of their project professionals against standardized job descriptions.

PathPro™ provides your organization with the consistent structure and accurate employee information that will help improve employee satisfaction and retention of your organization's most valuable resources.

Save start-up time and money with our professionally supported career path.  
**Get started today at [PMI.org/pathpro](http://PMI.org/pathpro).**

## ABOUT PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (PMI)

Project Management Institute is the leading global association and advocate for the project management profession. PMI's primary goal is to advance the practice, science and profession of project management. By building global consensus on roles, defining competencies and providing professional standards and credentials, PMI provides continuous support to project managers and the organizations that employ them.

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