

Taking Project Management Learning to a Higher Level

A look at what makes the HP project management education program so successful—and how the company is using it to build the skills of employees around the world.

Technology giant Hewlett-Packard (HP) has little room for error: It operates a portfolio of projects across more than 170 countries and has billions of dollars of revenue flowing through an array of initiatives. It stands 9th on the U.S. *Fortune* 500 list and is ranked 44th among the *Fortune* Global 500 companies. With managing large-scale projects as part of its core business, the company relies heavily on project management to produce desired results.

“Along with our strong interaction with customers and business partners, using integrated program and project management processes and systems is essential to the way HP excels,” says James E. Crotty, PMP, Hewlett Packard, Enterprise Business, Account Program Management Office Services for HP. “It’s what keeps us at the forefront of the IT services industry.”

To distinguish itself as a best practice leader in the project management field, HP has developed a comprehensive employee training and education program, managed by the company’s Learning and Development (L&D) organization. Mary Roche, in her role as portfolio owner for the HP project management L&D program, aligns the portfolio with the project management business needs of HP employees in all business units worldwide by collaborating with L&D business partners. The portfolio is designed to

support all levels of project managers and includes the “best of the best” by combining both HP-owned and strategic vendor-owned solutions in self-paced and instructor-led formats.

“The combined areas of portfolio, program and project management are one of our L&D Centers of Excellence,” Mr. Crotty says. “The goal is to keep expertise and knowledge up to date and ensure that the curriculum is vital and relevant.”

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING

Within the HP Enterprise Business division of the company, there are five core objectives when it comes to project management development:

- Develop employees’ business and project management skills to support the successful pursuit and delivery of client engagements
- Provide for the professional development and career growth of the project management community
- Align with the generally accepted good practices identified in *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, the most widely recognized global standard for the practice of project management

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- Prepare project managers for the Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] credential examination
- Provide a consistent worldwide program

The HP Project Management Profession is managed by global and regional councils that collaborate with L&D to establish the program and project management curriculum. The Project Management Profession has a strong concentration of leadership and membership from HP’s Enterprise Business unit, where employees follow a formalized project and program management career path.

Within this project and program management career path, the Project Management Profession has established six levels of proficiency: entry, intermediate, specialist, expert, master and strategist. Each level has defined skill, knowledge and experience requirements. To ascend to the fourth “expert” level, for example, an individual must have a PMP[®] credential.

HP’s L&D organization helps employees’ ascension by offering the training resources they need to align to and progress along the project management career path. As a result, employees can easily find the appropriate skill and knowledge development resources for their position within the company.

Throughout the program, there is a mix of hard skills, soft skills and business acumen development. The learning portfolio is iteratively evaluated and constantly updated based on the needs and feedback of the business. A “Best in Class” learning model guides the way, gathering requirements from key stakeholders, making make/buy decisions with regard to new solution development or acquisition, and

delivering high-quality training solutions to HP audiences worldwide.

“The goal is to keep learning dynamic and stay current with issues and trends in the field,” Mr. Crotty explains. “We continually examine our training programs to make sure that we are addressing issues in a comprehensive way.”

An additional benefit is that HP is a PMI Registered Education Provider (R.E.P.), an organization approved by PMI to issue professional development units (PDUs) for its training courses. Classes offered by R.E.P.s are pre-approved for contact hours in the fulfillment of certification eligibility requirements, as well as PDUs to fulfill the continuing certification requirements for PMI credentials. The eligibility of contact hours/PDUs from other sources is the responsibility of certification candidates and is determined on a case-by-case basis. The R.E.P. program has been designed to enhance the ongoing professional development of PMI members, those credentialed through PMI and others in the project management profession. (For more information, visit PMI.org/REP.)

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To achieve these objectives, HP has taken on a hybrid model that combines on-the-job learning, training courses, and networking and interacting with others through formal mentoring. Mr. Crotty says that “people gain about 70 percent of their development in project management through their daily experience with it. About 20 percent of this comes through networking, mentoring and other arrangements such as participating in professional associations, including PMI. The remaining 10 percent is web-, webinar- and classroom-based.” “In the grand scheme of things, the formal training experience is the smallest component but it is an extremely important piece of the puzzle.”

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HP'S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The HP Learning Management System is called “grow @hp,” and through its web interface, HP employees have access to an extensive collection of project management learning and development resources, as well as resources for related disciplines such as leadership, communications and people skills.

The HP project management resources within the learning portfolio rely heavily on a strong collaborative partnership with SkillSoft Corporation. HP has invested in the SkillSoft Project Management Knowledge Center, a one-stop portal containing project management resources, including *PMBOK® Guide*-aligned self-paced courses and online books, such as the *PMBOK® Guide—Fourth Edition*. Users also have online chat access to project management experts for questions on coursework or overall PMP preparation and maintenance. For example, students can either web chat or exchange e-mails with a subject-matter expert until they understand the concept in question.

“We recognize that it is essential for students to have human contact and support,” Mr. Crotty says. “Not all subject matter is best suited to web-based training. This is where the strength of the overall portfolio comes into play, where learners have the option to enroll in engaging interactive workshops led by experienced instructors with extensive project management experience.”

Online courses make learning convenient. A typical SkillSoft web-based course is approximately two hours long and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to students around the globe. This allows employees to access systems and information on any given topic as necessary—including when it's important to review for a particular situation or circumstance, whether it's risk management or business analysis. “They don't have to wait for a week-long course or find a time that works with their busy schedule. They're able to find the course material that's targeted to their exact needs, when they need it,” Mr. Crotty explains.

In addition, the KnowledgeCenter uses cutting-edge technology that ratchets up the learning experience, including online simulations to help students gain insights. In one course, for example, senior project managers use a program that unleashes various scenarios. As participants make decisions, the computer reveals the possible outcomes of their actions.

“The simulation helps them understand how their decisions affect the bottom line and how ideas and actions may have unintended consequences,” Mr. Crotty points out. “The KnowledgeCenter has produced amazing results in terms of learning.”

Another outlet for education is webinars, which provide a more dynamic form of online interaction. These sessions are often used for more specific knowledge-based training, and typically include a live presentation with audio and chat capabilities. Instructors initiate discussion and group interaction so that different ideas and thinking emerge.

HP's Enterprise Services organization also offers a 16-week virtual exam-preparation class for passing the PMP

WHAT IS AN R.E.P.?

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credential examination and improving project management skills.

The class is oriented to the needs of the mobile, customer-facing project management work-force and includes:

- Web-based coursework from the SkillSoft KnowledgeCenter PMP Roadmap
- *PMBOK® Guide* study
- Guidance on completing the PMI PMP exam application and scheduling the exam
- Group learning and mentoring
- Bi-weekly progress meetings
- PMP exam simulation that is part of the KnowledgeCenter PMP roadmap

But not all of HP's educational outlets are coursework-based. The Project Management Profession also publishes a monthly newsletter that focuses

squarely on project management issues. It provides resources and information about the hard and soft skills required for success in project management. It also offers perspectives on the industry and project management trends.

"In many cases, the newsletter provides a different perspective than people might get through the typical HP coursework," Mr. Crotty says. "It is more than a way to distribute and recycle HP thinking. It's a way to get new thoughts into the collective thinking of the workforce."

For example, the organization recently ran a story on Microsoft Project software training and what lesser-known resources and capabilities it offers. "The article provided insights into how to use the software more effectively and become better at what you do," he notes.

PUTTING EXPERTISE TO WORK

HP's holistic approach to project management learning and knowledge development has garnered industry attention as well. HP received two major awards from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and the 2005 PMI Professional Development Product of the Year Award.

"Hewlett-Packard's Enterprise Services organization has become a project management-centric organization. Tapping into the thought processes, intellectual capital and expertise of PMI, we have transformed the learning process and helped build a more focused and successful enterprise," Mr. Crotty says. ■