

## IBM China's PM Center of Competency Bridges the Skills Gap

In the 1990s, when IBM identified project management as a competitive advantage, they transformed from a traditional hierarchical structure into an enterprise-wide, project-based business model. Steering this transformation was a committee of senior executives drawn from all IBM business units. This committee chartered and still guides [IBM's Project Management Center of Excellence \(PM/COE\)](#). Its mission is to continue IBM's project-based transformation through corporate programs at individual, organization and enterprise levels. Its primary objective is driving business and client value through the efficient and effective use of project management identified and supported by IBM's World Wide Project Management Method (WWPMM). This is a single project management method used across all IBM business units and is based on *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*.

### BACKGROUND

One of the functions of IBM's PM/COE is to deliver the framework for the company's Global Delivery Centers (GDCs), providing them with knowledge share, techniques, tools and support. Functioning essentially as the "account managers" responsible for bringing in new clients, GDCs are critical to IBM's ability to provide client support at any level whether across a region or the globe. All GDCs, regardless of geographic location, must comply with IBM's global practices and be consistent in delivery of architectures, services and data security management. This allows IBM to deliver flexibility and scalability.

Spanning five continents and supporting broad requirements, IBM's GDCs offer an extensive and diversified talent pool with competencies in five critical areas: people, processes, analytics, data security and intellectual, property-based assets.

The China GDC was established in Shanghai in 1999, followed by five additional centers in Beijing, Chengdu, Dalian, Shenzhen and Wuhan. In 2008 China GDC transformed its structure into a complex matrix organization. Organized under IBM's Global Business Services, the center is positioned as a service delivery arm in China.

China GDC provides clients with a broad spectrum of services, including consulting, application services, systems integration, testing, solution management, maintenance, business transformation outsourcing services and IT infrastructure services. In addition, it supports leading package solutions such as the mainframe and e-business applications provided by SAP, Oracle and Siebel.

## CHALLENGES

China IBM's continuous and rapidly expanding growth in the number of project management practitioners and projects, customers and locations created great opportunities for the China GDC. To support these opportunities, China GDC built and cultivated an expanded community of project management professionals. China GDC began recruiting project managers from various industries who could bring different work experiences, skill sets and project management maturity levels to the GDC. However, opportunities also create challenges. Among those that China GDC had to overcome was the very diversity of its expanded project management workforce. Geographic distances combined with disparities in levels of experience, development and knowledge, along with communication difficulties, hindered alignment and integration with IBM's China business, creating barriers to growth.

## SOLUTIONS

To overcome these barriers, in 2008, following IBM's global model for its PM/COE, China GDC established a Project Management Center of Competency (PM Center of Competency) reporting to the IBM PM/COE to execute global programs across all China GDC sites. Its function would also include the development of local project managers. This put the China GDC in alignment with IBM's Global PM/COE.

IBM China GDC started with a small core team of experienced project managers complemented with volunteers in an extended/flexible team approach. These project managers not only maintained their regular assignments but also worked as project management champions at each of the remote China GDC locations.

To address the challenges caused by rapid growth, IBM's China GDC implemented the following measures complementing the actions of IBM's global Project Management Center of Excellence:

- Established a centralized IBM China GDC Project Management Center of Competency
- Identified project management champions at each China GDC location
- Reached out to various business lines across the organization to carry out project management programs
- Adopted and localized corporate best practices
- Established regular surveys among key stakeholders
- Implemented a process to connect and review progress with local management and key sponsors while continuing to work horizontally across business units

Each year, IBM China's GDC re-examines and updates the list of benchmarks from the number of certified project managers to skill-set matching, attrition figures, development progress, training and mentoring. They also look at the number of project managers who hold the Project Management Professional® (PMP®) certification from Project Management Institute®, the number of certified IBM project managers, project management training effectiveness and the ShareNet satisfaction rate. (ShareNet is an experience sharing, collaboration promotion platform whose content derives from weekly virtual audio/visual interactive meetings for all project managers.)

## RESULTS

Over time, IBM's China PM Center of Competency has played a significant role in improving project management competency at China GDC and its tremendous growth in both the number of project managers and their competencies. Communication and coordination with IBM's global project management organization has also experienced significant improvement through a consistent exchange of information.

As a result of IBM China's establishment of a Global Delivery Center PM Center of Competency, the company's global management team receives monthly progress and development reports and, in turn, supports, approves and provides guidance on key project management development programs at IBM China.

Thanks to the deployment of a consistent project management methodology across IBM, the China GDC PM Center of Competency can develop, deliver and maintain project management competency throughout IBM China's rapidly growing project management community.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

IBM China realized that, for China, dedicated project management was critical for bringing global best practices to project managers in China. To further customize project management to the local environment, IBM's China GDC PM Center of Competency has established language localization, initiated Project Management Days in each of the China GDC locations, publishes project management handbooks and conducts project management study group sessions.

Using ShareNet, global or local subject matter experts can speak on particular topics that touch on global or local areas of interest. This further promotes knowledge sharing and encourages Q&As and discussions. A mentor program has also been put in place. By ensuring that the right project manager with the right skill set and experience is assigned to the right project, China's PM Center of Competency delivers project performance at a consistently high level.

PMP® certification has increased more than 120% since implementation of the PM Centers of Competency and IBM Certified Professional certifications have increased more than 260%. China GDC is also experiencing a decrease in non-compliance and in troubled projects as project managers mature and become more knowledgeable. As a result, troubled projects are better managed and recovered.