



CASE STUDY

“Kaizen” for the Project Manager

Moving from Project Management to Program Management with MSP

By Michael Chiu

One common practice found across most industries is Project Management. As a way of introducing new products, functions, or services into an organization, the discipline of Project Management is used to coordinate and manage activities towards a desired goal. People have realized that adhering to a well defined and rigorous process makes a significant difference in completing a project on time, within budget, and with the desirable level of quality.

As this realization has taken place, professionals have sought a Project Management certification as a means of identifying themselves as a knowledgeable practitioner. The most sought after credentials are the PRINCE2 (Projects in a Controlled Environment) certification or the PMP (Project Management Professional) designation. It is no longer uncommon to find people with these skills. This has caused a problem for the practitioner: How do they stand out from the crowd and position themselves in the best way for both career advancement and new opportunities?

One path being taken by Project Managers is to expand the scope of their skills into Program Management, and the certification that stands out in this area is the MSP (Managing Successful Programs) Practitioner. What is Program Management? There are many definitions out there for a Program, but to quote from the MSP web site, “Program Management may be defined as the coordinated organization, direction and implementation of a portfolio of projects and activities that together achieve outcomes and realize benefits that are of strategic importance.” In short, Program Management goes beyond the scope of Project Management.





There are reasons to earn your MSP certification beyond the external recognition. The word “kaizen” is a Japanese term which is applied to the process of continuous improvement. While normally applied to fields like manufacturing or engineering, it can also be applied to the individual’s quest to further their professional skills and perform better in their job. It is nice to have a few extra letters after your name, but the real goal is to expand your knowledge and capabilities. By way of example, I am a registered MSP Practitioner. With skills in Program Management, I have a perspective beyond Project Management which makes me more competitive and valuable in the marketplace. Having been in the volatile high technology workforce for over twenty years, I have been through layoffs and company closures, and each time I was able to quickly secure a new job. This was because I could point to the skills I had developed through training and experience, which elevated my chances to be hired for a new position.

When MSP is applied to business, it helps the business improve delivery of change, demonstration of value, and improvement in key metrics such as profitability or customer satisfaction. The MSP model is based on three core concepts; Principles, Governance Themes, and Transformational Flow. Transformational Flow describes how a program should progress from the beginning to the end. The Governance Themes lay out a control framework through which programs can deliver their objectives and remain within corporate visibility and control. Principles are those concepts which are the underpinnings of successful transformational change.

The program will be more likely to achieve its objectives if MSP principles can be applied when we follow the transformational flow and exercise the governance themes. In some of my previous projects, I realized that the MSP model could help even at the project level. For example, the quality assurance in the scope of project

management is restricted only to meet the requirements and acceptance criteria of the project’s deliverables. But it is missing some important factors such as stakeholder relationships and their expectations, quality processes, leadership in quality culture, continuous improvement, etc. All these factors are being discussed in detail in the Governance Theme of Quality Management.

The results of my more recent projects, where I have taken these factors into account and applied the MSP guidance, were more successful than my earlier projects before I had been exposed to the MSP model. Achieving better project results not only benefits the health of your company or organization but has desirable personal benefits as well, such as an accelerated career path or management recognition.

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A number of my colleagues have asked me why I chose to become certified in MSP rather than in PgMP (Program Management Professional) from the Project Management Institute. They saw this as a natural choice as it would have been the follow-on designation from my PMP. The answer is simple. I wanted to gain the competitive advantages and recognition that can be provided by both the PMI and the OGC (Office of Government Commerce) which manages MSP. At this time, each organization has different sized followings in different parts of the world. PMI dominates North America, making the PMP and, to a lesser degree, the PgMP, common here. In Europe, the OGC best practices such as MSP, PRINCE2, ITIL, M_o_R (Management of Risk) and P3O (Portfolio, Program, and Project Office) are the de facto standards. In Asia, these two organizations seem to have the same number of adherents. With the growth of international business, the likelihood of managing a program or project in Asia or Europe is increasing, and having credentials from each organization is an advantage.

Further, PMI's breadth of credentials is still incomplete. While they have the PMP (Project Management) and PgMP (Program Management) designations, they do not have any offering for Portfolio Management though they do acknowledge the need for this. On the other hand, Portfolio Management is partially covered in the MSP guidance, and the OGC has recently announced separate guidance on the Management of Portfolios (MoP). The OGC has a greater breadth of guidance to help me in my career.



Michael Chiu has worked in the software development field for twenty years in a variety of industries; Finance, GIS, Health Care, Telecommunications, Mobile Communications, and Accounting. He has progressed in his career from programmer to Software System Architect. For the past ten years, he has focused on software development Project Management. He has been designated as exemplifying "Best Practice" by his previous employer for his project management skills, and was awarded "Best Employee" by another company. He holds a Bachelor degree in Electrical and Electronics Engineering from the University of Bristol, and holds an MBA from Cardiff University. Besides being a registered MSP Practitioner and PMP, Michael is a Sun Certified Java Developer and a Certified Scrum Professional. Michael currently works in Canada as a Senior Development Manager for a publicly held UK company.

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