

An **OnlinePMCourses** Special Report

# The Nine Steps of a Project Management Career



**OnlinePMCourses**  
Build Your Project Career

## The Nine Steps of a Project Management Career

If you are trying to build your project management career, it is worth understanding the stages you will go through, and what you need to do to make progress from one to the next.

### Stage 1: Beginner

This is the stage where a potential or new project manager commits to their career choice. In most cases, steps 2 and 3 will happen at the same time. This stage will typically last for around three years of continuous project experience. New project managers in this stage of their career will have some skills, and will be able to work effectively under supervision of an experienced project manager.

**Step 1:** Deciding that Project Management is an attractive career direction. New project managers are often attracted to one or specific elements of project management: the variety, challenge, uncertainty, pressure, or sense of achievement.

**Step 2:** Learning the basics. During this stage, project managers often experience their first basic project management training. They will also absorb a variety of articles and books. A good example of a book aimed at this audience is 'How to Manage a Great Project' by Mike Clayton.

**Step 3:** Experience roles in a project environment. New project managers need to gain experience of a variety of project work. This should expose them to the range of specific roles and, ideally, to the breadth of project types that they may be able to work on whilst with their current employer.

The PMI's criteria for the first of its principal qualifications match this stage. CAPM requires 1,500 hours of project experience. At 8-9 hours per day, and 230-240 working days per year, that's around 9 months. This suggests you'll be ready for that qualification during Step 2 or 3.

## Stage 2: Practitioner

As a project manager enters this stage, they will have a broad understanding of project work and be able to work largely unsupervised, with only a minimum level of supervision. By the end of this stage, which typically lasts from three to seven years, they will become fully skilled as a project manager; able to supervise a small number of beginner-level project staff.

**Step 4:** Lead a small project or substantial work-stream. By now a project manager will be ready to take a leadership role, heading a small team. They are ready for the responsibility, have the skills they need and, crucially, the self-awareness to know when to ask for help.

**Step 5:** Up-skill themselves with specialist and advanced level training. The second phase of formal learning is to understand the more detailed and specialized aspects of project management, such as risk management, stakeholder engagement, or benefits realization. They may also start to become expert on one of the particular project management methodologies like Scrum or PRINCE 2.

**Step 6:** Lead a substantial project. A significant leadership role is important, not just in testing a project manager's skills, but also to gain the recognition of peers, bosses and clients. At this stage too, a project manager should also be starting to share their knowledge by contributing to training or formal coaching and mentoring of less experienced project managers.

The PMI's criteria for its primary qualification matches this stage. PMP requires 7,500 hours leading and directing projects. This would logically follow the 1,500 hours of non-leadership project experience. At 9 hours per day, and 235 working days per year, that's around 3.5 years. This suggests you'll be ready for that qualification towards the end of Stage 2.

### Stage 3: Expert

After six to ten years, a project manager should become fully skilled and expert in managing projects. They are able to supervise a large team, and resolve complex problems. They will have the capacity to innovate, because the day-to-day requirements of their role will be familiar, and they will find it easy to delegate aspects of it effectively.

**Step 7:** Lead a large project with style. For an expert, effective delivery is nothing more than the barrier to entry. Increasingly it matters *how* you deliver your project. Different things will matter to different project managers and you will find your own signature style. Some will focus on their team's enjoyment of the process, others on innovation, or maybe staying ahead of the timetable.

**Step 8:** Develop thinking about methodology, processes and techniques. Beyond introducing innovation on particular projects, expert project managers will be constantly thinking about how to optimize what they are doing and then generalize their insights to contribute to the wider community. They will become active leaders of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) within their chosen professional body.

**Step 9:** Share their knowledge. Experts are also often keen to share their knowledge widely through seminars, lectures, articles and books. They will be sought after contributors to professional journals and conferences. And within their organizations, experts will take the lead in developing syllabus and overseeing the training of the next generation of project management experts.



## **This report was authored by Dr Mike Clayton**

Mike is the founder of **OnlinePMCourses** and both an experienced project manager at a senior level and a long-standing trainer of new project managers (since 1997). He is author of 13 books, including four on Project Management, and is a contributor to Project (the Journal of The Association for Project Management – APM) and ProjectManager.com.

**OnlinePMCourses** was founded to help you become a project manager, and build the project career you deserve. Its courses provide clear, practical knowledge, made easy to understand and apply.

The programs are designed for Beginner and Practitioner stage project managers. But we are all learning, and many experts will have come up the ladder with one or two gaps in their knowledge.

Learn more at [OnlinePMCourses.com](http://OnlinePMCourses.com).