



GAPPS

Global Alliance for Project
Performance Standards

A Framework for Performance Based Competency
Standards for Global Level 1 and 2 Project Managers

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Contents

Foreword	i
1. Scope	1
2. Performance Based Competency Standards	1
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	1
2.2 <i>Design of the GAPPS Framework</i>	2
3. Role Descriptions for Project Managers	3
3.1 <i>Differentiating Project Manager Roles</i>	4
3.2 <i>The CIFTER Factors</i>	5
3.3 <i>The CIFTER Ratings</i>	6
<i>The Crawford-Ishikura Factor Table for Evaluating Roles</i>	7
3.4 <i>Limitations of the CIFTER</i>	8
3.5 <i>The CIFTER and Career Development</i>	8
4. Application	9
4.1 <i>Use in Assessment</i>	9
4.2 <i>Relationship to Existing Standards</i>	10
4.3 <i>Adoption as a Standard</i>	10
5. Terms and Definitions	11
6. Units of Competency	12
<i>Unit Descriptions</i>	12
<i>Summary of Units, Elements, and Performance Criteria</i>	13
<i>PM01 Manage Stakeholder Relationships</i>	14
<i>PM02 Manage Development of the Plan for the Project</i>	17
<i>PM03 Manage Project Progress</i>	21
<i>PM04 Manage Product Acceptance</i>	24
<i>PM05 Manage Project Transitions</i>	26
<i>PM06 Evaluate and Improve Project Performance</i>	28

Appendices

A. Range Statements	32
B. Development of this Document	37
C. Mapping of Original 48 Concepts and Topics	40
D. Assessment Guidelines	42
E. Detail on CIFTER Ratings	44

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Foreword

As project management has become a more widely recognised management approach, governments, individuals, and both public and private sector organisations have become interested in frameworks and standards that describe levels of acceptable workplace performance for project personnel.

The *Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards (GAPPS)*, formerly known as the Global Performance Standards for Project Management Personnel Initiative, is a volunteer organisation working to create such frameworks and standards by providing a forum for stakeholders from differing systems, backgrounds, and operating contexts to work together to address the needs of the global project management community.

These frameworks are intended to support the development and recognition of local standards and to provide a sound basis for mutual recognition and transferability of project management qualifications.

The GAPPS frameworks are intended to be used by businesses, academic institutions, training providers, professional associations, and government standards and qualifications bodies globally. Frameworks may be used “as is” to speed the development of local standards, or they may be adapted to local needs.

This document is the first of several. Future documents may address program managers, project sponsors, project team members, project management consultants, project management trainers, or other levels of project managers.

A Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Global Level 1 and 2 Project Managers

1. Scope

This document contains a framework for performance based competency standards for two levels of project manager. The contents of this document may be used “as is” to expedite the process of standards development, may be tailored to reflect cultural differences or local practice, or may be mapped to other standards to facilitate transferability of qualifications.

The GAPPS Framework consists of:

- Performance based competency standards for two levels of the role of project manager.
- A detailed approach to differentiating the two roles or levels based upon project management complexity.
- Supporting material to aid in the application of the standards.

The two levels addressed, called Global Level 1 and Global Level 2, are differentiated by the management complexity of the project. Section 3 describes how to evaluate management complexity in the application of the GAPPS framework.

This framework is intended to be used to assess threshold competency — demonstration of the ability to do something at a standard considered acceptable in the workplace. It is applicable to Global Level 1 and Global Level 2 project managers in all fields of endeavour including, but not limited to: architecture, biotechnology, construction, design, education, engineering, financial services, government, government contracting, information systems, not-for-profit operations, pharmaceuticals, software, and telecommunications.

The GAPPS framework recognises that Global Level 1 and Global Level 2 are a subset of the full range of project manager performance: entry-level project managers generally function at a level of management complexity below that required for Global Level 1 while highly complex projects may require a level of performance beyond that of a Global Level 2 project manager.

2. Performance Based Competency Standards

2.1 Introduction

This section provides a brief overview of the subject of performance based competency standards (PBCS) for potential users of this document who are not familiar with the topic.

Competent comes from the Latin root *competere* which means “to be suitable.” In today’s workplace, the term “competent” is generally used to describe someone who is sufficiently skilled to perform a specified task or to fill a defined position — a competent physician, a competent salesperson, a competent plumber. Increasingly, organisations are interested in assessing the competency of individuals in order to guide employment and development decisions.

Broadly speaking, there are two major approaches to defining and assessing competency:

- *Attribute based* wherein personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, and other characteristics are identified and assessed. Competence is inferred based on the presence of the necessary attributes.
- *Performance based* wherein work outcomes and performance levels are identified and assessed. Competence is inferred based on the demonstrated ability to satisfy the performance criteria.

PBCS, also called occupational competency standards, are widely used throughout the world and have been developed within the context of government endorsed standards and qualifications frameworks in Australia (Department of Education, Science and Training), New Zealand (New Zealand Qualifications Authority), South Africa (South African Qualifications Authority), and the United Kingdom (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority). Although all of these approaches are focused primarily on *performance based* competency assessment, some approaches do include aspects of *attribute based* competency assessment.

2.2 Design of the GAPPS Framework

PBCS typically address at least the following two questions:

- What is usually done in this occupation, profession, or role by competent performers?
- What standard of performance is usually considered acceptable to infer competence?

In the GAPPS standards, these questions are answered by defining:

- **Units of Competency**

A Unit of Competency defines a broad area of professional or occupational performance that is meaningful to practitioners and which is demonstrated by individuals in the workplace. The GAPPS Level 1 framework includes five Units of Competency while GAPPS Level 2 includes six.

- **Elements of Competency**

Elements of Competency describe the key components of work performance within a Unit. They describe *what* is done by individuals in the workplace but do *not* prescribe *how* the work is done. For example, project managers must “define risks and risk responses for the project,” but they can do it themselves or delegate the work to others. In addition, there are many different tools and techniques that they could use. The GAPPS Level 1 framework includes 18 Elements of Competency while GAPPS Level 2 includes 21.

- **Performance Criteria**

Performance Criteria set out the type and/or level of performance required to demonstrate competence in each element. They describe observable results and/or actions in the workplace from which competent performance can be inferred. In the GAPPS framework, Performance Criteria can be satisfied in many different ways; there are no mandatory approaches, tools, or methodologies. The GAPPS Level 1 framework includes 56 Performance Criteria while GAPPS Level 2 includes 64.

- **Range Statements**

Range Statements help to ensure consistent interpretation of the Elements and the Performance Criteria by expanding on critical or significant aspects of them to enable consistent application in different contexts. Where the Range Statements contain lists, the lists are generally illustrative and not exhaustive.

Although some of the terms and definitions of the GAPPS framework described above differ in some respects from other PBCS, the overall approach is consistent and compatible with generally accepted practice within the field of competency development and assessment.

The Units, Elements, and Performance Criteria are not linear or sequential: there is no requirement that the work be done in any particular sequence or that the Performance Criteria be satisfied in any particular order. In addition, some Performance Criteria can be satisfied with relatively little effort while others will require a substantial commitment from the project manager over the full length of the project.

The Performance Criteria in this document focus on *threshold* performance — demonstration of the ability to do something at a standard considered acceptable in the workplace. They do not measure *superior* performance — what the best project managers do. Superior performers should, however, be able to satisfy the threshold criteria without difficulty.

The GAPPS standards include the minimum number of Performance Criteria needed to infer competence. As a result, a candidate must satisfy all of the Performance Criteria in the applicable Units in order to be viewed as competent. In addition, the Performance Criteria represent different levels of detail. The number of Performance Criteria in a Unit or Element is not proportional to the amount of time or effort that a project manager must spend in that area to be viewed as competent.

The material in this document can also be used to support learning and development when applied by qualified educators and trainers. In order to provide such support, the framework would need to be expanded to address questions such as:

- What skills and knowledge are needed to demonstrate this standard of performance?
- What are the parameters for collecting evidence and assessing performance?

Appendix C, *Mapping of 48 Concepts/Topics* and Appendix D, *Assessment Guidelines*, provide relevant information that should be useful to address learning and development needs.

3. Role Descriptions for Project Managers

The term *project* has been defined in many different ways. For example:

- “A time and cost restrained operation to realise a set of defined deliverables (the scope to fulfil the project’s objectives) up to quality standards and requirements.” (International Project Management Association)
- “A temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service.” (Project Management Institute, Inc., USA)

Despite the differences in phrasing, these definitions, like most other definitions of project, are conceptually equivalent. Whatever the words used, however, it is clear that a project can be small or large, short or long. A project could be:

- The development of a new power plant from feasibility and design through construction and commissioning
- The preparation of the feasibility study alone
- The construction activities alone
- The creation of a research report for a consumer products company
- The implementation of a new information technology system

In some organisations, project manager is a position with that title, while in others, it is a temporary assignment. Whether a position or an assignment, whenever a single individual is clearly responsible for the management of a project, that individual can be considered to be a *project manager* for the purposes of this framework.

In the context of the GAPPS framework, being responsible for the *management* of the project includes being responsible for the relevant aspects of *leadership* as well. For example, project managers may need to align, motivate, and inspire project team members in addition to doing the more routine activities such as planning and reporting.

3.1 Differentiating Project Manager Roles

Project managers are expected to produce essentially the same results — outputs and outcomes that are acceptable to relevant stakeholders. However, the context in which these results are produced may differ: some projects are inherently harder to manage than others. A project manager who is competent to manage an easier, less complex project may not be competent to manage a harder, more complex project.

GAPPS has developed an approach to categorising projects based on their management complexity. The GAPPS framework uses a tool called the Crawford-Ishikura Factor Table for Evaluating Roles, or CIFTER. The tool, named after two major contributors to GAPPS, is used to differentiate project manager roles based on the complexity of the projects managed.

The CIFTER factors identify the causes of project management complexity. For example, in some application areas, a project manager's ability to control project costs is considered to be the primary factor in determining competence. The CIFTER provides a mechanism for matching competence to need by identifying the factors that affect the project manager's ability to control costs.

The CIFTER identifies seven factors that affect the management complexity of a project. Each factor is rated from 1 to 4 using a qualitative point scale, and the factors are totalled to produce a management complexity rating for the project. The use of the CIFTER is described in more detail in the remainder of this section.