GAPPS | Global Alliance for the Project Professions

A Guiding Framework for Leadership in Complexity

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Foreword

Faced with volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, governments, individuals, and both public and private sector organisations have become interested in frameworks and guidance that describe competencies required for leading in complexity. This complexity can be associated with dealing with interdependencies and delivery of endeavours in many different contexts including projects, programs, contracts, supply chain, and business as usual across all industries.

The *Global Alliance for the Project Professions, formerly known as the Global Alliance for Project Performance Standards* (GAPPS) is a volunteer organisation working to create performance based frameworks and other products by providing a forum for stakeholders from differing countries, systems, backgrounds, and operating contexts to work together to address the needs of the global program and 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, program, and other management role-related 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 fifth framework produced by the GAPPS. In 2006 the GAPPS released the first version of *A Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Global Level 1 and 2 Project Managers.* In 2011 the GAPPS released the first version of *A Framework for Performance Based Competency Standards for Program Managers*. In 2015 the GAPPS released *A Guiding Framework for Project Sponsors* and in 2019 they produced *A Guiding Framework for Project Controls*.

Future documents may address other roles involved with projects and programs.

Further information or copies of the frameworks can be found at
https://www.globalpmstandards.org

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
3.00	4th February 2020	WIP Draft document
3.01	16th May 2020	Amendments agreed at TLF#46
3.02	4th September 2020	Amendments agreed at TLF#47
4.01	1st February 2021	Amendments agreed at TLF#49
4.02	12th May 2021	Amendment to typing error in LC01

A Guiding Framework for Leadership in Complexity

1. Scope

This Guiding Framework is performance based, presented in the form of descriptors of minimum acceptable performance in the workplace. Such descriptors will usually be developed for a specific role. In this case the focus is on the minimum competencies required for anyone endeavouring to get things done in the face of complexity across all types of endeavour and in all roles and contexts. It is intended to complement existing standards, guidelines, and frameworks. The focus is therefore on including only those actions and competencies specifically relevant to leadership in complexity.

The contents of this document may be used "as is" to support your organisation's development processes or to expedite the process of competency descriptions or standards development. They may be tailored to reflect cultural differences or local practice, and they may be used as a baseline to compare, through a mapping process, with other guidelines.

The GAPPS Framework consists of:

- Five units of performance based competency for Leadership in Complexity.
- Supporting material to aid in the application of the Guiding Framework.

This framework follows the format of performance based competency standards and 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 those responsible for Leadership in Complexity in all fields of endeavour including, but not limited to: aerospace, architecture, automotive, biotechnology, construction, defence, design, education, engineering, environment, financial services, government, government contracting, information systems, law, mining, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, software development, telecommunications and for-purpose or third sector (not-for-profit).

2. Process

Work on a performance or competency based framework for a Leadership in Complexity began in March 2017 at GAPPS Thought Leadership Forum (TLF) No 37 hosted by the Autónoma University and the Portuguese Association of Project Management (APOGEP) in Lisbon.

In November 2017, at GAPPS TLF No 39, GAPPS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Centre for Complex Project Management (ICCPM) which was beginning a review of the Complex Project Manager Competency Standard (Version 4.1 August 2012) for which the copyright is

held by the Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Defence) and ICCPM is the review, update, and authorisation authority. As part of this review, GAPPS offered its assistance and collaborated with ICCPM using the GAPPS from GAPPS TLF No 40 to GAPPS TLF No 45 to conduct the public consultation phase of the review. In addition to the GAPPS TLF events, ICCPM organised six additional workshops between February 2018 and July 2019 (see Appendix C) to progress the work . The result of this joint process was the production of a Work-in-Progress Guiding Framework for Project Leadership in Complexity V2.0. which both organisations have used as the basis for the development of their own end products.

Development of the framework included a review of relevant resources. A list of references is included in Appendix A.

Globally representative and experienced project professionals (see Appendix B) were asked to focus on what practitioners are required to do when leading in complexity. At each of the sessions where leadership in complexity was addressed, the work of previous groups was reviewed and progressed in an ongoing validation process. A list of GAPPS Thought Leadership Forums and other events at which work on the guideline was done is provided in Appendix C.

In early 2020 a review of the document was undertaken by several experienced practitioners and their comments addressed at GAPPS Thought Leadership Forums No 46. In September 2020 an exposure draft was released for public comment and the comments received were addressed at the GAPPS Thought Leadership Forum No 49 in January 2021 prior to publication.

Accepted practice in development of performance based competencies[1] is to seek input from practitioners on what is considered to be minimum acceptable performance in a particular role. Therefore, the process will usually start with a definition of the role. In this case it was agreed that the focus would be on the minimum competencies required for anyone endeavouring to get things done in the face of complexity across all project types and in all contexts. It was intended to complement existing standards, guidelines and frameworks. The focus was therefore on including only those actions and competencies specifically relevant to leadership in **complexity**.

3. Context

Complexity means different things to different people. It is very much in the eye of the beholder and is not a binary concept. There are degrees of complexity. Uncertainty, ambiguity, and the interactions of multiple stakeholders with differing perspectives are sources of complexity. Other sources may be technological, organisational, structural, temporal, environmental, relational, or

[1] Heywood, L., Gonczi, A., & Hager, P. (1992). A Guide to Development of Competency Standards for Professions. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

social[2]. Perceptions of complexity are influenced by interactions between people and their context. Individual perceptions of difficulty or complexity will be influenced by past experience, personality and confidence, familiarity, novelty, culture and values and the extent to which there is supportive infrastructure.

Distinctions may be drawn between complicatedness and complexity. Essentially, an endeavour may be considered complicated when there is a large number of interconnected and interdependent parts. It becomes complex when the interdependence and interconnectedness of those parts changes in unpredictable ways.

Snowden's Cynefin Framework[3] distinguishes between contexts that may be considered simple, complicated, complex, chaotic, or in a state of disorder. In simple and complicated contexts there may be one or more right answers and it is possible to discern or analyse relationships between cause and effect. In complex contexts there may be no right answers and no clear relationships discernible between cause and effect except perhaps in retrospect. Simple and complicated contexts are amenable to rational, linear and reductionist approaches but complexity is characterised by emergent properties requiring non-linear responses that may include iteration and experimentation. In reality, even endeavours that may be considered simple or complicated may have some level of complexity especially when people are involved and where there are high levels of environmental or technological uncertainty.

A number of tools that can be used for assessing and characterising complexity are provided in Appendix D.

This Guiding Framework has been developed to address the challenges commonly faced when leading in complexity and is not intended or expected to be used in isolation. It may be used in conjunction with other frameworks, guides and standards that address areas such as project management, program management, project controls, change management, risk management, and social responsibility.

A list of frameworks and standards that might be used in conjunction with the Guiding Framework for Leadership in Complexity are included in Appendix E.

[2] Williams, T. M. (2002). Modelling complex projects. Wiley; Remington, K., & Pollack, J. B. (2007). Tools for complex projects. Gower.

[3] Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A Leader's Framework for Decision Making. (Cover story). Harvard Business Review, 85(11), 68–76.