

People Competence Assessment Based on Project Management Scenarios

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Abstract

Scenario-based assessment makes it possible to represent situations related to professional project management practices and, in this sense, allows the assessment of competences in contexts inspired by professional environments. From the point of view of project management competences, the Individual Competences Baseline (ICB) describes the competences required for individuals who work in the field. This framework shows, besides other competences, the 10 (ten) competences focused on people, namely: introspection and personal management; personal integrity and reliability; personal communication; leadership; teamwork; relationships and engagement; resourcefulness; conflict and crisis; negotiation and results orientation. This study aims to analyze the process of assessment of competences based on Project Management scenarios, in the context of the Engineering field. This study was based on an experimental process and involved Professors and Professionals in the Project Management area. As a result, an assessment of competences was obtained through dynamic, interactive scenarios, which promotes reflection and is aligned with professional project management practices. Another result points to the potentiality of applying scenarios, as a complementary strategy to traditional assessments. For future work, it is suggested to develop scenarios that can assess the other competences required by individuals who work in project management.

Keywords: Competence Assessment; Competences focused on People; Scenarios; Project Management.

1 Introduction

The field of project management is evolving: old methods undergo modifications, new tools are created, and researchers propose new points of view in their studies (Wawak & Woźniak, 2020). Although the area of project management is relatively recent (Kerzner, 2009), its importance has been growing continuously in recent years (Wawak & Woźniak, 2020) and, consequently, the profession of project management follows this growth and permanent changes (IPMA, 2015).

Several methods and techniques have been developed covering all aspects of a project, from its conception to the final delivery (Patah & de Carvalho, 2012). Despite this, few assessment methods address project management competences. Process-oriented standards mainly prescribe procedures and methods; whereas competence-oriented standards present a broad spectrum of knowledge and competences required for successful performance (Vukomanović, Young, & Huynink, 2016).

The International Project Management Association (IPMA) has developed a global framework that defines the competences required by individuals working in the field of project, programme and portfolio management, named the Individual Competence Baseline (ICB) (IPMA, 2015). The Individual Competence Baseline show the division of the classification of competences into three domains: competences focused on the perspective, which respond to the context of projects; competences focused on people, which respond to personal and social topics; and the competences focused on practices, which respond to the specific practices of project

management (IPMA, 2015). The definition of the term competence, according to IPMA (2015) refers to the demonstration of competence as the application of knowledge, skills and abilities to achieve the desired results.

From the perspective of competences focused on people, organizations that group and/or select people with the appropriate profile in teams to solve tasks/activities will have better chances of remaining in the market, and creating value for customers when compared to organizations that do not apply or consider this "approach" (Scott-Young & Samson, 2008). Competences act as a differentiating factor in performance, and the fact that competence management is a feature in which organizations have been investing is not a casualty, however, a competence assessment process is required.

According to Tinoco, Lima, Mesquita, and Souza (2022), the most common assessment methods focused mainly on the theoretical aspect of knowledge do not seem to be sufficient to prepare professionals for professional practice. In this case, it emerges the need to present alternative approaches capable of preparing the professional of project management more effectively for the challenges of the job.

In methods of assessing competences in areas related to Health and Education, one of the approaches used is the assessment of competences based on scenarios (Hagler & Wilson, 2013; Kennedy, Regehr, Baker, & Lingard, 2008; Redfern, Norman, Caiman, Watson, & Murrells, 2002; Van Der Vleuten & Schuwirth, 2005). The scenarios are structured in situations inspired by professional practice. The situations allow professionals to respond to challenges supported by their competences, and to be assessed according to the situation with which they are being confronted (Tinoco et al., 2022; Wroe et al., 2017).

According to Hagler and Wilson (2013), no studies present guidelines for the development and use of scenarios in assessment processes. Despite this scarcity of research, it is possible to state that the assessment of competences based on scenarios requires the consideration of at least three key elements: (1) Competences, which reflect the behaviour to be assessed; (2) Instrument to support the assessment; and (3) Scenario, which provides the context for the assessment (O'Brien, Hagler, & Thompson, 2015). Within this framework, for competence to be assessed, it is necessary to plan the assessment and develop an instrument that supports the process (Hagler & Wilson, 2013). Rubrics are important instruments in assessment processes (Arcuria, Morgan, & Fikes, 2019) as they establish criteria and levels through a rating scale (Shipman, Roa, Hooten, & Wang, 2012). The use of rubrics, therefore, allows for an assessment based on criteria previously due and developed according to the context of the assessment. Thus, the study's overall objective is to analyze the process of assessment of competences based on Project Management scenarios, in the context of the Engineering field.

2 Background

2.1 Individual Competence Baseline (ICB)

The framework describes a set of competence elements for individuals working in Project, Programme and Portfolio Management. The design of the framework was developed by the International Project Management Association (IPMA). The model has become a reference focusing on the individual who works on Projects, Programs and Portfolios. According to Vukomanović et al. (2016), this model excels in enriching and enhancing individual competences and providing an inventory of competences that, if fully observed, represents a complete knowledge of these management domains.

Each individual must have competences focused on perspectives, which respond to the context of projects, competences focused on people, which respond to personal and social topics, and competences focused on

practices, which respond to the specific practices of project management (IPMA, 2015). Thus, the model developed for project management contemplates, in total, twenty-eight competences, as well as Table 2.

Table 1. ICB Individual Project Management Competence IPMA (2015).

PRACTICE COMPETENCES (14)	PEOPLE COMPETENCES (10)	PERSPECTIVE COMPETENCES (5)
Project design	Self-reflection and self-management	Strategy
Requirements and objectives	Personal integrity and reliability	Governance, structures and processes
Scope	Personal communication	Compliance, standards and regulation
Time	Relationships and engagement	Power and interest
Organisation and information	Leadership	Culture and values
Quality	Teamwork	
Finance	Conflict and crisis	
Resources	Resourcefulness	
Procurement	Negotiation	
Plan and control	Results orientation	
Risk and opportunity		
Stakeholders		
Change and transformation		
Selection and balancing		

Without disregarding all types of competence, the decision was made for this study to analyze and select the subset of competences focused on people. This option is related to the fact that such competences are the least studied in the area of Engineering Project Management and have a high level of relationship with the way they become effective in other competences. Moreover, people have high importance and contribution to the success of projects.

2.2 Assessment of Competences

The assessment of competences transcends the disciplinary areas and its research has increased worldwide (Souza & Lima, 2020). The assessment of competences in the universe of Engineering is something relatively new when compared to other disciplinary areas, namely Medicine and Education. The assessment of competence arose from growing criticism of traditional testing; methods related to the unrealistic nature of tests. As a consequence, there was a "loss of faith" in valid learning measures (McDowell, 1995).

Scenario-Based Assessment is a form of assessment and learning that has been established for over 50 years and has grown in practice. Scenarios represent any activity that can exemplify particular issues and situations at work (Carrol, 1999). Scenarios are, the starting point for individuals to immerse themselves in a real-world problem, developing a subsequent solution-finding process. During this process, they must apply their individual knowledge and cognitive and social competences to solve problems collaboratively (Erol, Jäger, Hold, Ott, & Sihm, 2016). In this case, the difference from traditional assessment methods to a scenario-based assessment is represented in the practical component and inspired by real-world problem.

In addition to the assessment approach, according to Marinho-Araujo and Rabelo (2015), it is necessary to develop assessment tools that show how the articulation between theory and practice occurs and propose assessment indicators that highlight the competences. In this sense, considered as an assessment instrument, rubrics establish criteria and levels through a rating scale and can offer a more equitable and consistent assessment, thus avoiding subjectivity (Shipman et al., 2012). Moreover, rubrics are characterized as a differentiated assessment instrument compared to traditional educational assessment instruments, such as written tests, by integrating assessment criteria associated with professional practices (Souza, Margalho, Lima, Mesquita, & Costa, 2022).

3 Methodology

This study aims to analyze ten scenarios and rubrics for competences assessment, focused on people, of Project Management, and in this way, it was defined as an Assessment Model for Project Management People Competences.

For the development of scenarios, the six steps defined in Souza, Lima, Mesquita, and Margalho (2022) served as a reference and the study of Souza, Margalho, et al. (2022) for the development of the rubrics for evaluation. The model, in addition to scenarios and rubrics, presents procedures and information for the evaluation. This includes the objectives, instructions and background. Evaluated participants do not have the evaluation rubric in advance. The evaluation criteria included in the rubric are well-known indicators in the area of project management.

Each scenario in the model assesses a competence focused on people and includes a rubric for assessment. Regarding objectives, each competence relies on the definition of some key objectives. These objectives are associated with the rubric for evaluation and, therefore, are the evaluative criteria, more specifically, the key indicators of the IPMA (2015). The template presents the instructions for the evaluator in a standardised way for all scenarios. Appendix A presents a scenario and rubric for assessment of the Personal Communication Competence.

As for the experimental process to evaluate the model, it was carried out on May 2022 and involved the participation of 49 people. The following participated in the application: twenty evaluators; ten evaluated participants; twelve observers; two trained personages; two consultants and three people from the support team. For the assessment process, ten classrooms were organised, called stations, in which one people-focused project management competence was assessed per room. At each station, there were two evaluators, one with an academic profile and the other with a professional profile. At the door of each station, the scenario to assess competence was fixed. Each participant evaluated had two minutes to read and understand the scenario and, after a beep, could enter the room. The response time for each scenario was eight minutes. At the end of the time, the sound signal rang again, informing the end of the time for the evaluation process at each station. Immediately, the participant moved to the next station. The evaluation process was continuous and intermittent, ending when the participants had passed through all the stations.

For data collection, questionnaire surveys were carried out and participants were asked to answer a set of open questions and a closed question following an established order. To analyze the results, the content analysis technique was used as the data collected were systematised based on this technique (Bardin, 1977).

4 Results

The results of this study emerge in the identification of the benefits and applicability of the evaluation model, based on Engineering scenarios.

4.1 Benefits of Scenario-Based Competence Assessment

With the application of the model, we sought to assess the benefits based on the study participants (evaluators, evaluated participants and observers). To analyze the results of the benefits, Table 2 presents the results collected based on the measure of the frequency of the list of benefits, identified in the literature. The most representative benefits mentioned by the groups were namely: dynamic and interactive evaluation process; promotion of creativity and self-knowledge; and alignment with professional project management practices.

Table 2. Benefits of the Competences Assessment Model.

Benefits	Evaluators (n=20)	Evaluated (n=10)	Observers (n=12)
	Frequency (f)	Frequency (f)	Frequency (f)
Dynamic and interactive	13	10	6
Diversified and representative	8	2	1
Visual and practical	10	2	1
Explains reasoning in an open manner	11	6	7
Mobilisation of competences	11	3	5
Assertive assessment	1		3
Aligned with professional practices	12	6	6
Promotes reflection and self-knowledge	15	8	12
Encourages creativity compared to other assessment tests	12	8	9

According to the observers, the alignment of the scenarios with Project Management Professional Practices was identified as an excellent contribution of the model:

"Very realistic and meets the reality in the labour market." (Fixed Observer 1)

" (...) this method brings participants into real professional life." (Fixed Observer 8)

" (...) it portrays situations that happen frequently in the world of work, from conflicts between team members to delays in projects." (Fixed Observer 2)

Furthermore, mobilising resources to face/respond to a real-life scenario provokes the participant to self-reflect on their performance, as highlighted by the evaluators:

"I think one of the benefits is that it is an individual exercise, allowing the participant to have a self-perception of the competences associated with the scenario in real-time, considering their own performance, insofar as it is also a context close to the real context." (Evaluator 16)

"(...) allows for the analysis of personality traits, self-reflection and analysis from different perspectives of the same problem." (Evaluator 28)

Concerning spontaneity and creativity to respond to the situations presented in the scenario, the participants state that:

"(...) promotes the spontaneity and creativity of the people being assessed. (Participant 7)

" (...) more valid and spontaneous way because the answers are not studied or decorated." (Participant 6)

" (...) it forces you to work creatively." (Participant 7)

In addition, evaluators highlighted as an assessment process that manages to obtain answers from the professional without provoking or causing embarrassment and also promotes the participants' power of synthesis:

"It is a process that manages indirectly to get answers without having to cause embarrassment to the interviewee." (Evaluator 21)

"It makes the appraisee more comfortable to speak because it is about opinions to a third party. It's great because most people would find it very difficult to talk about themselves." (Evaluator 22)

4.2 Potential Applicability of the Scenario-Based Competence Assessment

The study findings concerning the applicability of the competence assessment model were evidenced, for example, by Participant 2 statement:

"The potential of using scenario-based assessment is huge. After going through the experience, it is funny to realise how extensive it is and the wide spectrum of applications. It forced me to reflect and 'dig' into perhaps more lost and not-so-present capacities that should be harnessed." (Participant 2)

Other potential applications of the scenario-based competences assessment can be identified in the data, namely:

For professional recruitment processes:

" (...) it could be an added value in selective processes, just like the dynamics of selective processes." (Evaluator 23)

" (...) whether with traditional corporate recruitment methods where we already know that there is always the typical question "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?" and "What are your two best qualities and defects?" or "Tell me a bit about yourself". This method highlights the genuineness of the answers and in my opinion will end up being very useful." (Participant 6)

For team acquisition or selection:

"(...) for example, in my first teams, the choices of the elements fell a lot on the person's technique, and what he or she could do, with the gain of experience I started to opt more for personalities, so I think this process fits here, more than knowing if the person is good technically, we should look for a personality that fits the project." (Evaluator 29)

For training processes in team building actions, coaching, in addition to teacher training for the area of Education.

" (...) is transferable to different areas of knowledge. By way of example: in the area of Education it could be something carried out in teacher training." (Evaluator 16)

" (...) it can be applied in team buildings in companies, in the sense of training." (Evaluator 14)

In the academic field:

" (...) the use of this type of assessment at the academic level (and beyond) better prepares students for the real world." (Participant 1)

"In pedagogical terms, it seems to me that there is a lot of potential to empower students with some competences, which are highly valued by companies, but hardly teachable." (Evaluator 12)

Finally, the results show a higher contribution assessment approach when compared to traditional assessment models:

" (...) the creation of this assessment method proved to be more efficient and interesting compared to a traditional test (...)." (Participant 1)

" (...) major differences between this model and assessment tests lies in the practical component that the scenario model has." (Fixed Observer 2)

" (...) I perceive its value as a complement to a traditional assessment, to assess skills that are not normally assessed." (Participant 9)

Learning with this type of assessment model, based on scenarios is an added value if compared to so-called traditional assessment models:

" (...) I learned much more than if the assessment was based on normal assessment tests." (Fixed Observer 2)

5 Conclusion

The scenario-based competence assessment process provided participants with moments of learning and development of their competences. Such a conclusion is based on the need to mobilise the resources, knowledge and abilities they need to interact with the different scenarios. This process enabled great contributions of the assessment model competence to be evidenced as an excellent model for learning and developing project management competences.

The main benefits verified are the identification of a dynamic and interactive assessment process, which promotes creativity and self-reflection, providing alignment with the professional practices of project management. Besides providing the assessment based on scenarios, quite interesting and enriching when compared to traditional assessment methods that are less integrated and tend to quantify in a less effective way the presence and even the metrics of the competence assessed.

The perception of assurance of success and quality of the competences assessment model implied ensuring its potentiality as an assessment model with contributions for organizations, certifying agencies, and individuals benefited with new and better ways of assessment and certification of competences of engineering project management. Furthermore, the model was evaluated by professionals as an excellent method of evaluation, allowing the selection of the professional for the intended function taking into account the competences essential for the success of the project. For certifying agencies, a scenario-based assessment process allows the individual to mobilise competences that they are often unable to demonstrate and/or mobilise in traditional methods. The assessment model generates motivation and enthusiasm and allows creativity to be explored.

The assessment model competence in engineering project management represents an innovation for the professional field with several potential applications, namely in recruitment processes, team acquisition, and training, in the academic field and replaces and/or complements traditional assessments. In addition to this, the absence of scenario-based assessment models within the professional scope was confirmed and the evaluators, evaluated and observers highlighted the fact that they had never participated in a scenario-based assessment process throughout their professional career.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the scenario-based model for the assessment of project management competences is an innovative way to the assessment of competences, focused on people, of project management.

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Appendix A - Sample Scenario and Rubric for Assessing Personal Communication Competence

TITLE: ONE STEP AT A TIME

The project manager of the development of a new line of sports shoes started a meeting by asking each team member to report on the activities developed in the previous week, according to the planning.

The employee Duarte, assigned to develop the new brand logo design, reported that he had sent the material to the marketing department for dissemination. He also mentioned that the version sent included the numerous changes and modifications made by the design team. Duarte explained to the project manager that, after numerous unsuccessful attempts through the project communication channel (e-mail) with the person responsible for validation/approval, he had to take such a decision to minimise delays that would harm the project. In his opinion, the version sent was in accordance with what was expected from the design project.

The project manager didn't let Duarte finish his speech and loudly shouted to the whole team the lack of responsibility and commitment of Duarte, by sending an activity without approval, and the damage that could cause to the project. He stressed that he had already mentioned that in situations like this, it would be necessary to attend and consider the procedures established in the communication plan. Imagine that the CEO of your company identified these symptoms in this particular team and decides to talk to the project manager, in this case, YOU.

Talk to the CEO of your company about the essential aspects of personal communication in Project Management and its importance for the project to be successful.

CHARACTER: YES / CEO OF THE ORGANISATION

PURPOSE OF THE STATION

This station aims to assess the participant's ability to mobilize personal communication arguments. The following are some key indicators that the participant will be able to demonstrate:

- i) Provide clear and structured information to others and check their understanding.

- ii) Facilitate and promote open communication.
- iii) Choosing the style and channels of communication to meet the needs of the audience, the situation and the level of management.
- iv) Communicate effectively with virtual teams.
- v) Use humour and relativisation where appropriate.

When assessing the participant, consider the following instructions. View them as guidelines only.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EVALUATOR

- a) Make sure the participant has read and understood the scenario.
- b) Cue the participant to start.
- c) Immediately, the character starts the dialogue. The character (CEO of the organization) is trained to have a harsh and indignant attitude towards the failure of communication in a large and important project for the organization. He will intervene in the first 2 minutes of the evaluation and then ask for the participant's opinion on aspects of good communication.
- d) Consider, in the participant's performance, the interaction with the character.
- e) Answer "don't know" if the participant asks if you know something or if you like something or if you ask for their opinion.
- f) Act in a standard way for all participants. The evaluator should give the participant as much space as possible so that they can present their perspective. Let the participant finish his/her line of argument, without interrupting him/her.
- g) Ask questions linked to competence in case the participant starts repeating himself or blocking. Some examples of questions are: Have you been through a situation similar to this one, either as a leader or as a team member? If so, what actions have you taken that you think might be helpful for this scenario? What can we do to promote good communication in projects?
- a) Develop further questions related to this competence if you identify that it is necessary.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHARACTER

- a) After the participant enters the room, the character starts the dialogue.
 - b) The character must present a harsh and indignant attitude towards the communication failure in a large and important project of his company, only in the first 2 minutes of the evaluation. Afterwards, he/she will ask the participant's opinion on aspects of good communication, and the failed act of project management.
 - c) The character should act in a standard way for all participants. You should give the participant as much space as possible so that he can expose his perspective. Let the participant finish his line of argument, without interrupting him.
 - d) If the participant starts repeating himself or blocking you can ask questions linked to the competence. Some examples of questions are
Can personal communication benefit the management of a project? This week, I was reading a book by a recognized author in Project Management, Harold Kerzner, and I observed the following statement: "In a project environment, a project manager may well spend 90% or more of his or her time communicating." How do you interpret this statement?
 - e) The character, if necessary, can develop further questions linked to this competence.
- The participant has 8 minutes to be interviewed. After the 8 minutes, you will hear a beep, and the evaluator will have 2 minutes to complete the evaluation rubric. Do not give feedback to participants.

BACKGROUND

Personal communication includes the exchange of information that is correct, accurate and presented consistently. The purpose of this skill is to enable an individual to communicate effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations, to different audiences and across cultures.

Personal communication describes the essential aspects of effective communication. Both the content and the medium of communication (tone of voice, channel and amount of information) must be clear and appropriate for the target audience. The individual has to check the understanding of the messages being conveyed by active listening and seeking feedback. The individual promotes open and sincere communication and masters various types of communication (presentations, meetings, memos, etc.), recognizing their value and limitations.

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATION

When evaluating the participant, consider the following rubric for evaluation. The measures considered most aligned with the current scenario have been highlighted, but the evaluated may demonstrate other measures depending on how they explore the scenario

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATION - PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

NAME EVALUATOR:

PARTICIPANT N°:

	Weight (1)	Weight (2)	Weight (3)	Weight (4)	Weight (5)
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Key Indicators	The demonstration of this indicator and its measures is inadequate.	The demonstration of this indicator and its measures is low than expected.	The demonstration of this indicator and its measures is reasonable.	The demonstration of this indicator and its measures is good.	The demonstration of this indicator and its measures is excellent.
I1 - Provide clear and structured information to others and verify their understanding					
I2 - Facilitate and promote open communication					
I3 - Choose communication styles and channels to meet the needs of the audience, situation and management level					
I4 - Communicate effectively with virtual teams					
I5 - Employ humour and sense of perspective when appropriate					

I1 - Provide clear and structured information to others and verify their understanding: 1.1 Structures information logically depending on the audience and the situation; 1.2 Considers using story-telling when appropriate; 1.3 Uses language that is easy to understand; 1.4 Leverages public speaking and presentations; 1.5 Coaches and gives training; 1.6 Leads and facilitates meetings; 1.7 Uses visualisation, body language and intonation to support and emphasise messages.

I2 - Facilitate and promote open communication: 2.1 Creates an open and respectful atmosphere; 2.2 Listens actively and patiently by confirming what has been heard, re-stating or paraphrasing the speaker's own words and confirming understanding; 2.3 Does not interrupt or start talking while others are talking; 2.4 Is open and shows true interest in new ideas; 2.5 Confirms message/information is understood or, when needed, asks for clarification, examples and/or details; 2.6 Makes clear when, where and how ideas, emotions and opinions are welcome; 2.7 Makes clear how ideas and opinions will be treated.

I3 - Choose communication styles and channels to meet the needs of the audience, situation and management level: 3.1 Selects appropriate communication channels and style depending on the target audience; 3.2 Communicates via selected channels according to the selected style; 3.3 Monitors and controls communication; 3.4 Changes the communication channels and style depending on the situation.

I4 - Communicate effectively with virtual teams: 4.1 Uses modern communication technology, (e.g. webinars, tele-conferences, chat, cloud computing); 4.2 Defines and maintains clear communication processes and procedures; 4.3 Promotes cohesion and team building.

I5 - Employ humour and sense of perspective when appropriate: 5.1 Changes communication perspectives; 5.2 Decreases tension by use of humour.