

SUSTAINABLE CHANGE



Mark Robinson is Head of PM People and Governance at Airbus. He tells **David Gale** how he has helped drive a sustainable change in PM culture across the business and improve the overall competencies of the PM population.

Mark looks back on the past few years at Airbus and recognises a significant change within his business environment.

"Go back five or six years and we were benchmarking outside of Airbus," he explains. "We have gone through a real business transformation step by step and in some areas without even knowing it and that is best sometimes. Companies are now coming to us as they see what we are doing in project and programme management and using us as a benchmark."

But as Mark explains, it wasn't always the case. "Go back in history at Airbus when we had share price impacting issues involving our new flagship aircraft, A380. Developing a new aircraft means you are betting the company as you are spending over €10bn – it's a huge complex project to manage. We realised we had to do things differently and so we did."

The real levers for change came after the publication of two influential reports in 2007/8, one by Deloitte, the other by the US government accountability office. They assessed why their Aerospace and Defence contracts were late and over budget and analysed five root causes.

These included programme management challenges, technical complexity issues, talent shortage, supply chain challenges and politics.

"In Airbus we had many of these same issues," adds Mark. "The talent shortage was a key driver for Airbus both in project

management and systems engineering as were the supply chain challenges. As over 60 per cent of our work is in the supply chain and that is really key to making the project a success."

Mark found that there was no supported PM or PMO development path. "In Airbus, PMO is both an organisation (project and programme office) and a role (project management officer).

"It became clear that we needed to drive a dedicated development path for our PMOs and project leaders and also at the same time improve the integration of process methods and tools. The vision was to create a sustainable cultural change."

In 2009 a group-wide PM Improvement Programme was launched. As part of this, Airbus set up a Centre of Competence for Project and Programme Management with a vision to create a sustainable cultural change.

Mark explains: "We had tried to deliver this before but it never got the right level of attention. This time around the vision was backed up with the attitude that we are going to ensure we deliver."

"There was a budget and resource to support it and there was board-level sponsorship. It came from the very top."

"It was essential that it was sponsored at board level. A lot of senior people thought that they should personally support and move it forward rather than treat it as another initiative and risk losing the momentum."

Airbus recognised that culture change would take time but saw it as an integral way of working in the future.

Mark adds: "It was always a long-term



Mark Robinson

Biog: Mark is an experienced programme manager and chartered engineer of complex transnational projects in the aerospace and defence industry and graduated from the school of 'Pragmatic Programme Management'. In his current role he is accountable for leading the Airbus PM global governance, PM standards, PM categorisation, PM certification, resource management and Leaner Business Improvement plus (LBiP+) methodology. He is also the Head of the Airbus Group PM Academy.

vision. To support this we set up the Airbus Group PM Council and a Steering Board as well. The role of those was to sponsor the change but also to set the strategic direction and harmonise group policies on project and programme management which we hadn't really done before across the whole group.

"Two initial key drivers we then launched to support this were Project Categorisation and PM Certification. This was not just symbolic but a clear sign that we believed in what we were doing"

Project Categorisation is an agreed Airbus Group policy, mandated across the business. It assesses any project against 16 weighted criteria, looking at elements like project complexity, risk and the overall project challenge. The priority is to assess the projects prior to launch because the result drives other processes including PM Certification and Earned Value Management implementation.

Mark says: "We did some outside benchmarking with some companies such as Siemens and then put that into our own business context so it made sense for Airbus."

"So we assess the different elements looking for objective evidence and enter the results into a model. From this we get a score which determines the Project Category based on five levels – Iron, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Each assessment is reviewed by an independent panel before the Category is formally assigned."

Mark believes that because of the collaborative nature of the categorisation process, project leaders gain a better

understanding of the project itself.

"We don't just look at the budget but review the complexity of supply chain, maturity of the technology, etc, and it gives a really good view of the project from different angles and people do really learn a lot from the process. At first people saw it as a compliance thing – that they had to do it – but the feedback we get from project leaders and PMOs is that it really does add value. It identifies what we know but more importantly what we don't know and that is where we need to put our energies."

However, it was the introduction of the PM Certification that proved to be the real enabler for cultural change across the business.

Mark explains: "We spent a huge effort in benchmarking and developing our own model which is fully aligned with the project categorisation process."

"We have five different levels of PM certification which look at the individual's experience in project management, product and technical management, multi-function and multi-cultural experience and also the finance and business-related experience."

"What differentiates this is that we don't just look at project leaders and PMOs on our Aircraft Programmes but the wider population too. For example, we actively encourage engineers, IS/IT project leaders and business change project leaders to be involved."

Each applicant fills in a personal dossier as part of the scheme. Airbus deals with about 50 dossiers a month and by September of this year should have 2,000

Diagram below: Project Categorisation matches projects against weighted criteria so that they are assessed before launch.

people who have gone through the process.

"There is no pressure to complete a dossier in a given time period – it depends on the individual, their experience, training and career path to date," explains Mark. "The dossier is then formally assessed by an independent panel which either grants the person a specific certification level or suggests a level and advises them what gaps they need to fill before a certificate can be granted. This could be through

additional training, for example.

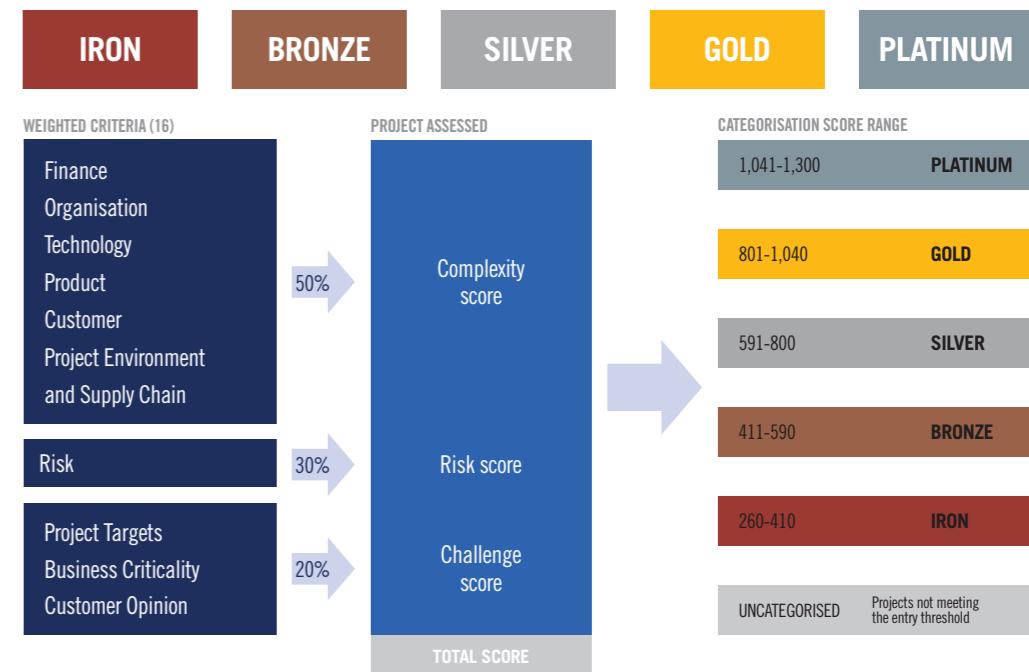
"Once certified they become part of our PM Professional Certification population."

"At the start it was not easy. We had a huge stakeholder management exercise and many communication events. People needed convincing. However, this was not just a 'one-off'."

"We still ensure individuals are supported when going through the process to allay any fears they may have and we are continuing to communicate at

What is Project Categorisation?

THE SCORE DIFFERENTIATES FIVE DIFFERENT LEVELS:



“FROM ALL MY EXPERIENCE I DON’T KNOW ANY OTHER COMPANY THAT HAS INTEGRATED PROJECT MANAGEMENT, LEAN MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT TOGETHER IN ONE METHODOLOGY.”

every level including reporting to the Airbus Group PM Steering Board.

“We aim to be very people-focused and once individuals go through the certification scheme this is linked to a development plan – what do you need to do to get to the next level and what is the career path within the business? We work very closely with our HR colleagues. What we are trying to do now is match the project category to the certification levels of the individuals. At first people were nervous: they thought that if they didn’t get the right level of certification would they still be the project leader? This is certainly not the case but for new projects certification is really an entry criteria so when we advertise for a new role we now put the certification level required.

“On some of the major programmes the heads of programme and chief engineers are now certified. It’s leading by example and that has really changed the behaviour and the mindset within the company and makes it easier to drive the change.”

One area where the business recognised a need for change was the role and perception of the PMO. With currently

about 650 PMOs deployed around the business, Airbus thought it was vital to raise their professional standing.

“People were recruiting PMOs across the business and calling them PMOs but they weren’t really doing the PMO job.

“What we did was bring the PMO population under the umbrella of the Centre of Competence and create a clear job description with associated competencies.

“One of the key drivers for this was that we increase the ‘make/buy’ ratio. Historically in some areas the ‘make’ was 20 per cent and the ‘buy’ was 80 per cent, so we had a huge turnover of people and were losing the skills and capabilities of the individuals.

“The ‘make/buy’ is now about 50/50 and we partner with just three different companies for the supply of our PMO resource – more of a strategic partnership – to raise the skill level of our PMO population and the role itself.

“We are very strict now: if someone wants a PMO we approve what they are doing through a clear job description or for external resource through a work specification which is formally validated.

“We have taken away the perception that the PMO is just a project administrator – emphasising it’s more of a navigator to a rally driver. We are driving a real profession and a supportive career development path. We still have a way to go but it’s a real success story.”

“To support our PM population we have brought together the shared PM knowledge for Project, Portfolio and Programme Management into our PM @ Airbus Guidebook. This year we have launched our Version 2, printing 5,000 hard copies that are complemented by an electronic flipbook version. Together with the electronic PM reference library which contains all the PM Standards, templates and best practice examples, this really

Pictured below: British Airways takes delivery of its first A380. The aircraft flew to London Heathrow where it received a warm welcome.

helps to reduce the learning curve effect, especially when people move from one project type to another. It has now become our ‘bible’.”

Another of Mark’s roles at Airbus is head of the Airbus Group PM Academy. This year alone the Aircraft side of Airbus is training 6,000 people from across the business in various elements of Project, Programme and Portfolio Management with an increasing emphasis on behavioural training.

Mark adds: “Four years ago we would do more of the hard skills training – training in the tools, etc. Where we are focusing now and moving ahead in the future is with the human side of PM.

“As part of our PM certification scheme we also have mandated a broad range of training that people need to do so they get a wider view of PM; for example, contractual management, supply chain management, configuration management.

“I was in Tokyo recently for a conference and all the delegates were wearing badges saying they were a PMP professional. Everyone thought that was the highest qualification in project management, so I emphasised in the presentation that the PMP is important, as is The APM Project Management Qualification (APMP) for APM and we recognise both, but they are just one element at our bronze level certification.

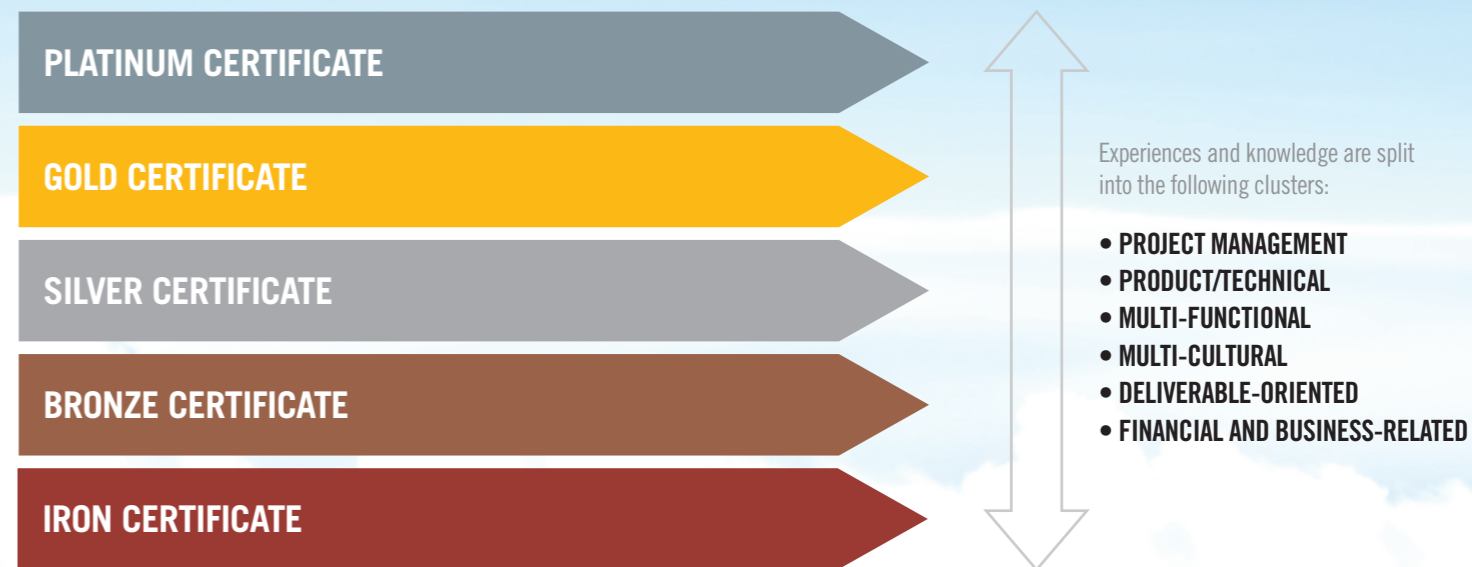
“It puts it into a little bit of context; we want the more rounded individual as well, and the qualification is just one element.”

The launch of the Development Centre for Project Management (DCPM) is another key area of development. Devised to run eight times a year with 12 individuals at a time and sponsored by the Airbus Group PM Council, it’s all about the individual’s personal development.

Mark adds: “It’s a development centre, not an assessment centre, which is quite important. People come to the centre by

PM certification levels

- THE AIRBUS PM PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION DIFFERENTIATES FIVE DISTINCT LEVELS.
- FOR EACH CERTIFICATION LEVEL, MINIMUM COMPETENCIES ARE DEFINED, COMBINING SPECIFIC UNITS OF PM-RELATED TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE.



nomination, but they must have completed their PM certification.

“We are not assessing them for promotion; we are looking at how they can improve their own personal development.

“The design of the centre is both innovative and unique as it is adaptable according to the behavioural needs of the participant. The role-play encourages faster learning as it is customised to the individual.

“The participants are observed by a panel of senior management, HR and specialist consultants. The role of the panel is to provide constructive feedback in order to encourage the participant to put in place the most appropriate follow-on learning measures.”

Alongside the DCPM, Airbus also runs workshops known as PM Adventure which targets both project management and change management professionals.

“The focus here is on our bronze level within our PM certification scheme whereas the DCPM is targeted at silver level,” explains Mark.

“Before the workshop, each participant has an emotional intelligence test which looks at different elements including self-awareness, assertiveness, self-actualisations etc. They get individual confidential feedback from this and then work as part of a business simulation for a fictitious company. Each person is given intensive peer feedback and then after the two days can transfer the learning straight back into the business. We also help them create

their own personal development plan.”

To complement the above, Airbus has set up a partnership (initially in France) to launch a Masters Degree in PM built upon the competence model of the industrial partners (technical and soft skills). This will be available across the whole Airbus group as a fast track for:

- Engineers who wish to move into PM
- Project Leaders and PMOs who need to increase their competencies.

Mark believes that Airbus is leading the way in business change with the development of its Leaner Business Improvement Project plus (LBIP+) methodology, launched in March.

Mark says: “From all my experience I don’t know any other company that has integrated project management, lean management and change management together in one methodology.

“LBIP+ is another key lever for us – it’s a methodology. We have a life cycle and it’s supported by specific competence. For example, the leaders of a business improvement project need additional competencies in change management. So now we have recognised that the people running business improvement projects may need a slightly differentiated learning solution.”

Within the methodology there is a dedicated life cycle and interactive e-site, blended learning, gate review checklists, tool kits for PM, Lean and Change Management. Importantly Airbus has the ability to tailor the approach to

Diagram above: APM Certification Level gives individuals a specific certification level based on criteria. Once certified they become part of the PM Professional Certification Population.

the complexity of the project.

“We probably run at any one time 2,000 business improvement projects,” continues Mark.

“These range from local improvement to major transformation platforms where you are looking to save over €1bn and you need good project and programme management practices to do that.

“So it’s really an holistic approach and it’s now mandated throughout Airbus. We have a momentum now, we work very closely with the lean academy and the lean guys. It’s really powerful.

“To capitalise on the learning we also have a dedicated Community of Practice (CoP) where we bring together practitioners from around the business to share good practice, lessons learned and to animate the network.

“Moving forward we aim to keep up the momentum. We do recognise that the business is changing from major new aircraft developments to more incremental developments such as our A320 and A330 NEO projects. Time to market is key. We have production ramp-ups to manage and a widening Industrial footprint such as our new Final Assembly Line in Mobile, Alabama. Speed, simplicity and agility are required in everything we do and I believe with the enhanced competencies of PM population we are ready to deliver.”

Making Projects Fly conference
23-24 October in Toulouse:
www.evaintheuk.org/conference/

