Updates on examinations for
APMP: The APM Project Management Qualification
January 2015

CONTEXT FOR THIS DOCUMENT

Examinations for APMP: the APM Project Management Qualification (including the tailored examination for registered PRINCE2 Practitioners) aligned with the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition* (BoK6):

- Candidates have a choice of which questions they answer
- Keywords are List and Describe, Explain and State
- There is definition of keywords for the examination in the candidate guidance
- There is definition of the keywords within the examination paper

As we have now completed over seven months of these examinations, it is a good time to provide additional notes and clarification to support learning for candidates, training providers and markers. This note is available to all of these stakeholder groups to ensure that consistent information is shared with all key parties. Please feel free to share them with your candidates.

The structure of this document is as follows:

- In bold capitals is the topic being commented upon
- In bullets are the issues/observations made in moderation
- Where a bullet has been placed in bold text, it is to highlight a key message to the readers of this document
- Where a table is used, this is to illustrate some specific examples
- Against each specific topic, where a BoK6 page reference is available, this has been placed next to the subject title

EXAM TECHNIQUE ISSUES

- Focus on the question asked
  - For example, where a question asks for "benefits of an effective sponsor", candidates are often providing answers about what would happen if the sponsor was ineffective or absent. Ensure the answer is stated in the positive ... benefits.

- For List and describe questions
  - Be careful of the list item – for example if the question asks, "List four responsibilities of a project sponsor", *benefits* wouldn't be sufficient on its own. Alternate options for a list item may be one of the following:
    - *Benefits realisation*
    - *Benefits delivery*
    - *Benefits management*
    - *Benefits definition*
  - List items must be clearly unique rather than subsets of the same topic

- Where a question seeks 'advantages' – this is seeking positive perspectives/outcomes/understanding
- Where a question seeks 'disadvantages' – this is seeking negative perspectives/outcomes/understanding
- Where a question seeks 'benefits' – this is about the positive aspects of having something, <u>not</u> an interpretation of what the absence of a benefit may mean
- **There is no negative marking anywhere in our examinations. All candidates are marked on the answers given, to the questions as posed.**

MATRIX MANAGEMENT raised in August communication **(pg 104-105)**

We continue to have some poor/weak responses from candidates as to the advantages and disadvantages of matrix management. There seems to be a significant lack of understanding in this area.

REVIEWS raised in August communication **(we suggest review of written articles in publications and web based information)**

Peer reviews are still proving an issue:

- A peer review, may be approached from a number of perspectives however **in each instance, a peer review is something that is not 'required' but is requested by the owner of the task or output. Alternatively it may be offered by the organisation in support of the owner**
- The BoK does not have detailed explanation in this area
- The peer review is typically:
    - o formal/informal
    - o conducted by someone of appropriate skills/experience
    - o a resource from another function to provide objective opinion
- Examples of a peer review may be:
    - o a walkthrough by team members to support a colleague by providing feedback
    - o another project manager reviewing a project management plan on behalf of a colleague
    - o a subject matter expert providing an opinion of the specification document
- A peer review is <u>not</u> a project progress review, gate review or post project review
- A peer review is <u>not</u> conducted by a more senior member of staff
- A peer review is <u>not</u> an audit
- An Audit is formal and has an agenda or list of points to comply with. Often these are tied to a mature governance process. Typically there is a sense of this being a hurdle where the outcome options are that the project can pass, fail or indeed have recommendations with which the project has to comply within a set time frame.

Procurement Strategy vs Procurement Process

Candidates appear to be confusing the two terms. One being the rules to follow, the other being the steps you take to achieve procurement.

Strategy being the governance, boundaries and constraints around procurement. This may include aspects such as organisational policy, sourcing preferences and corporate relationship practices, using a purchasing department.

Procurement process being the steps taken in a procurement process for example, invitation to quote, invitation to bid, selection criteria and hurdles (or minimal boundaries such as number of employees, track record indicators, etc.)

Procurement Terminology

We've seen weaknesses in candidate understanding of procurement terms and contractual orientation. These are standard terms which we would expect a candidate to have sufficient awareness of these expressions. They are outlined within the BoK6, within resource management, procurement and supplier selection areas (from pg 200 onwards).

Quality Management

This is another area where candidates appear to have limited knowledge/confidence and in particular the relationship between a Quality Management Plan and the components of the quality management process. Typically where the Plan outlines the processes, strategy and organisational preferences to Quality Management and outlines the components of the Quality Management process. There also is still some confusion between continuous improvement and lessons learned.

Benefits of Earned Value Management

Candidates tend to reply with how variances are calculated, rather than answering the question as posed. They ought to be able to define the benefits of employing Earned Value Management.

Delphi technique
Candidates appear to be paraphrasing this technique into 'brainstorming for SMEs' within a group/team context. There needs to be clear understanding that this technique is typically a process where each of the experts are remote/external to the project team. This is available through RAND (who originally developed the technique) and also readily defined in multiple search engines.

Candidates that refer to Delphi as 'the same as brainstorming' are submitting incorrect answers.

Teamwork
We have candidates who explain teamwork by citing the 'Tuckman' model being a process for team formation, development, management and dissolution. There may be reference to Tuckman – but an explanation of the Tuckman model alone is not an explanation of teamwork in itself.

Leadership
Some candidates have struggled with identifying leadership qualities and responding with situational leadership styles which are behaviours. It is completely acceptable to cite 'flexibility' or 'adaptability' as a quality – but not to cite each of the situational leadership behaviours as qualities.

Marking
We've had some queries about some of the terms used in feedback. We are providing our markers with the following guidelines to help standardise language used and increase consistency. A selection of these words are included below, other similar terms are employed by individual markers throughout feedback. When used against each specific style of question:

EXPLAIN
- Poor (0-3 marks) – providing little/no or incorrect answer content
- Weak (4-5 marks) – limited relevant answer provided, insufficient content
- Good/adequate (6-7 marks) – a reasonable answer, appropriate to the question
- Very good (8-9 marks) – good points made which are both relevant and well explained
- Excellent (10 marks) – answered fully, giving competent/coherent responses

DESCRIBE
- Poor (0-2 marks) – providing little/no or incorrect answer content
- Weak (3-4 marks) – limited relevant answer provided, insufficient content
- Good/adequate (5 marks) – a reasonable answer, appropriate to the question
- Very good (6-7 marks) – good points made which are both relevant and well explained
- Excellent (8 marks) – answered fully, giving competent/coherent responses

And finally, please remind your candidates to **read the entire question and answer the question posed.**