

Improve your Project Management by applying Project Excellence

Dr. Thor Möller

(Director, con-thor Unternehmensberatung, Hamburg, Germany)

Abstract

To apply for the IPMA International Project Excellence Award means to compete with the best projects in the world. To be confident enough to do so, you need an excellent approach to manage your projects and extraordinary results of the project as well. But how to get this? This paper will show you how to improve your project management by applying Project Excellence in short-term and long-term-thinking. You will start a continuous improvement process by re-thinking your performance and results consequently, developing your own benchmarking and comparing with excellent practices. It may take a number of projects until you reach excellent practices and results. But you have two really important reasons for: Your project results will be much better and the satisfaction of stakeholders will increase significantly from the really beginning of your optimisation. And you may be awarded by IPMA with their famous International Project Excellence Award once. Start now!

Key Words

Project Excellence Model, Assessment, Improvement, Benchmarking, Project Excellence Award

Introduction

The Project Excellence Model (PEM) was developed in 1996 as a tool to assess projects which are applying for the Project Excellence Award. The approach was based on the ideas and structure of the Business Excellence Model of European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). Main difference is that the PEM is not focusing on an (institutional part of an) organisation but on one single project. Since more than 10 years it is well known and highly accepted as a comprehensive assessment tool all over the world.

The author of this article is working with this model since several years in different high responsible positions, nationally and internationally. A lot of the latest developments of the approach are invented or influenced by him, such as new assessment tables, new time scale, icons and the “Way to Project Excellence”. This paper will introduce the Way to Project Excellence from strategic view and as a step-by-step handbook to enforce every project manager to apply this approach.

Overview Project Excellence Model and process

The PEM is divided into two main parts: project management and project results. First part contents the project management activities and processes, the so called enablers. Second one contents the results of the project including the satisfaction of all stakeholders. In total there are 9 criteria, which are divided into 22 sub-criteria (see Fig. 1).

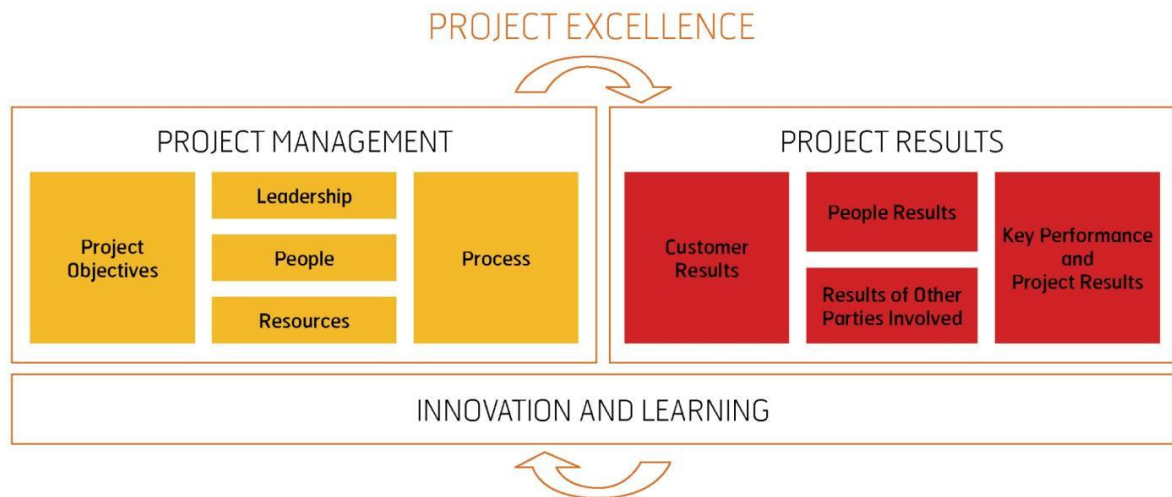


Figure 1: The Project Excellence Model (PEM)

Fig. 2 shows the overall process. It is divided into 4 phases and shows the 4 main roles. The PEM and the assessment process is nearly stable since 1996, that means for about 14 years already.

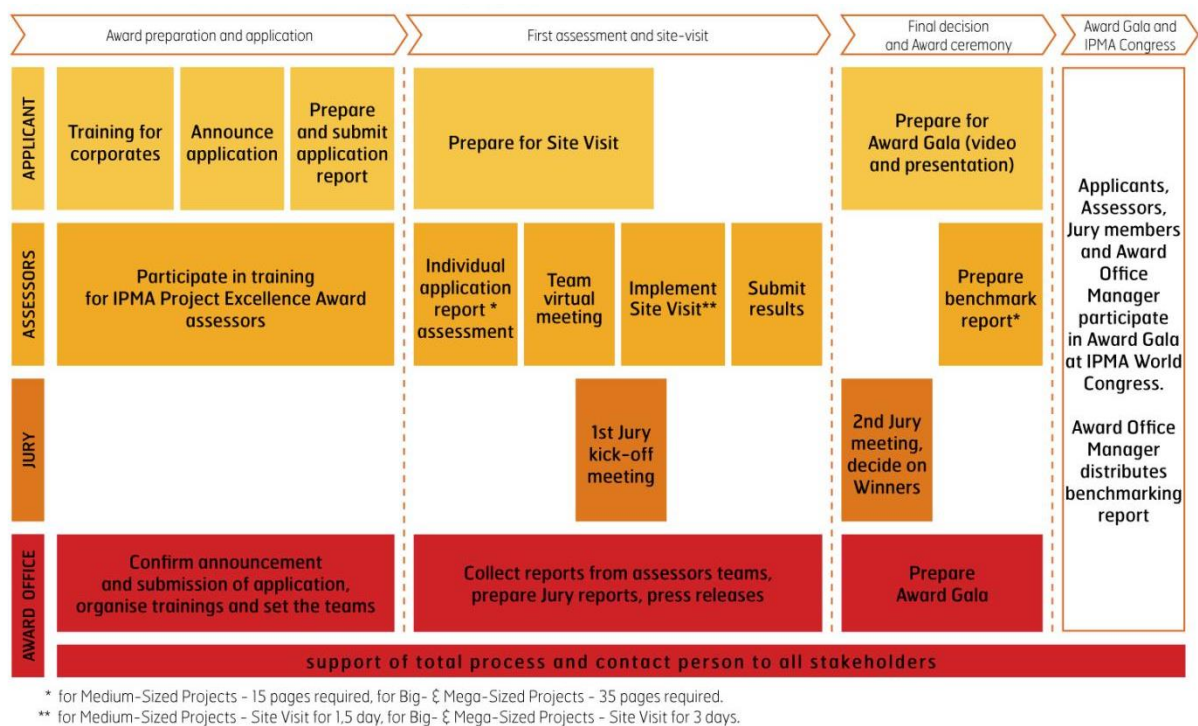


Figure 2: The overall process of applying for the IPMA Award

Overall process of self assessments

In the beginning you need to define your strategy to do the self assessment. You need to formulate e.g. your objectives and the intensity (scope, what size, what kind or how many projects to assess, budget, etc.). Doing this you should be sure about the costs and benefits of this undertaking (see Fig. 3).

To get a solid insight into Project Excellence it is recommended to join the IPMA training for award assessors and / or applicants. You may take part in a real assessment process by IPMA as well. Afterwards you can start to select one or more projects to assess as well as your (internal) assessors. Then do the assessment on site of the project and document your findings and scoring.

Costs / Efforts	Benefits
Train your people in Project Excellence	Teams getting known the strengths and improvement potential of the project.
Define your way of doing self assessments	Teams measure where they stand on the way to excellent project management.
Do the assessment (with one or more assessors) → this will take time of project team members as well	Teams develop an action list to improve the work on the project.
Travel to the site of the project	Organisations establish a base for optimising future project work.
Document findings and prepare the feed back	Teams create possibilities for comparison with other project teams (Project Benchmarking).

Figure 3: Cost benefit analyses of self assessments

As a result define your main success factors as well as activities to improve your project management. Finally start to implement your findings into your running projects and project management systems.

By applying the PEM as an internal assessment tool for single projects in your organisation you can start to develop a company wide project benchmarking based on PEM (see Fig. 4). If you start internally you can develop a data base for best practices. This data base should be structured by the criteria and sub-criteria of PEM. Later on you may initiate an external benchmarking with another organisation as well. In this case it is much more important to have the same structure of your data base than to work in the same sector or have the same kind or scope of projects.

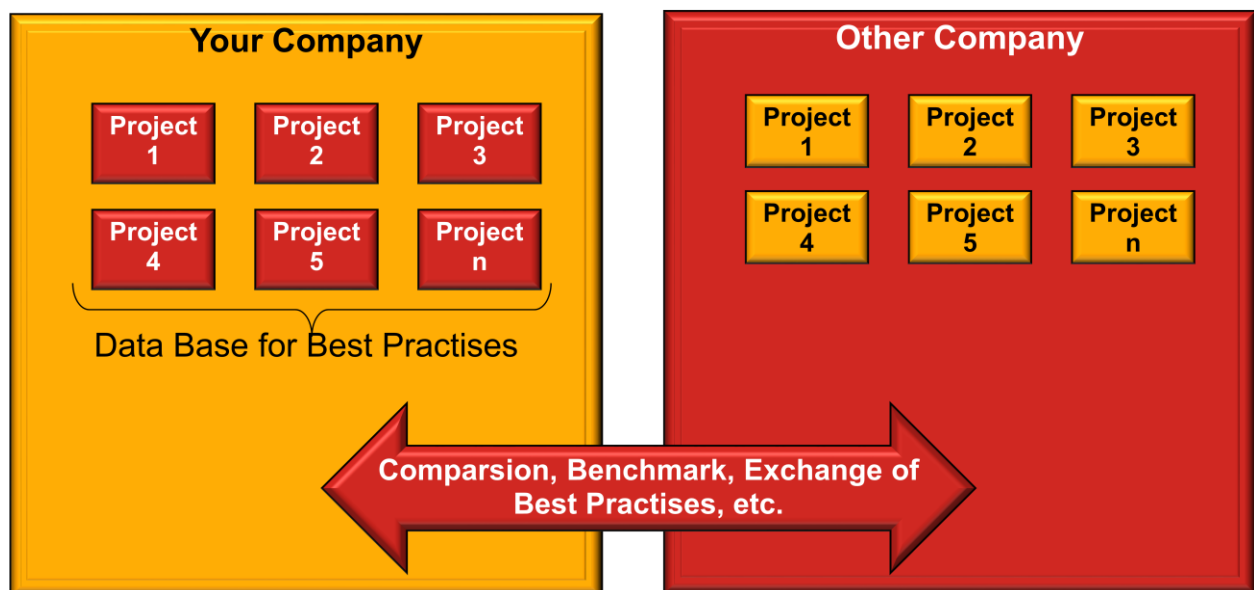


Figure 4: Internal and external Benchmarking

Summary overall process of self assessments:

- Define your way to do the self assessment.
- Join a training for award assessors (optionally, but recommended).
- Select one or more projects to assess.
- Select the internal assessors, if you don't want to do this as project manager yourself
- Do the assessment in once on site of the project.
- Document your findings and scoring.
- Define main success criteria / factors as well as issues to improve your project management.
- Develop a company wide Project Benchmarking.

Step-by-Step Implementation of Self Assessments

Start by selecting and assessing one single project. Take your project documentation and compare it with the relevant sub-criteria and examples of PEM. This comparison will give you a lot findings about activities to improve your project management process. Document theses findings and start an action list to implement them consequently

(see Fig. 5). Practicing this not only once but two or more times in a single project you will notice the progress and improvement.

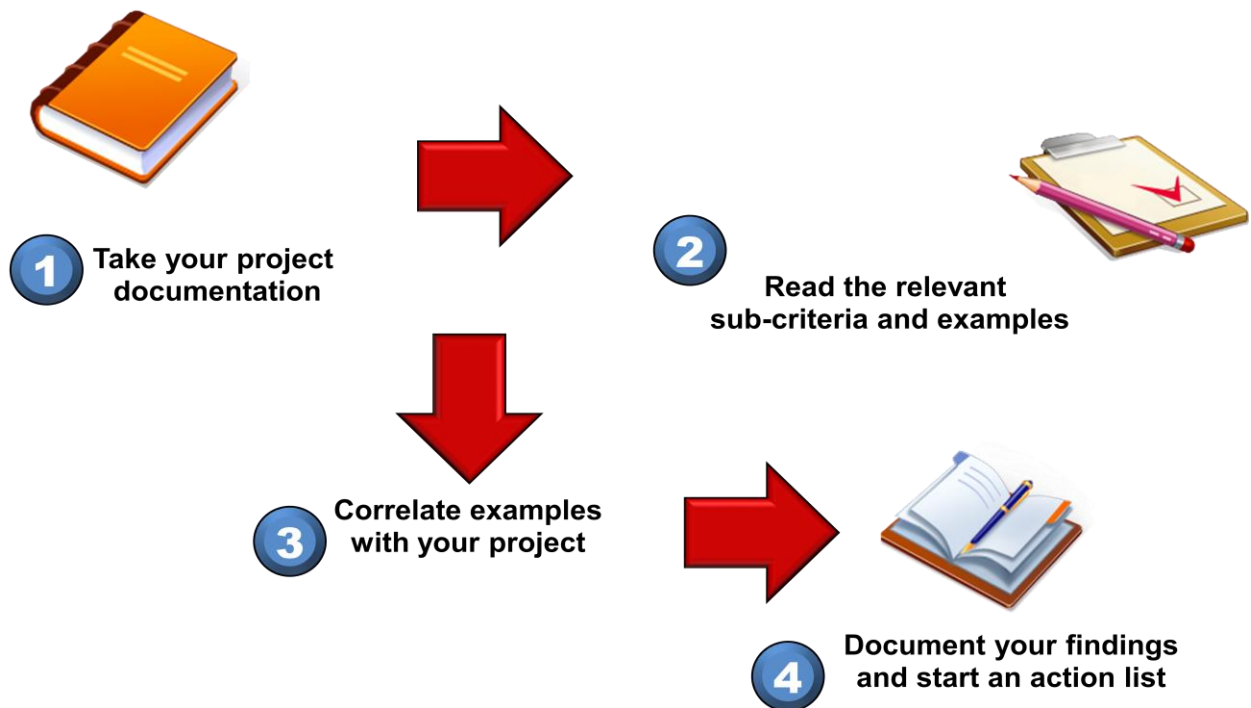


Figure 5: Main Steps of self assessment

If you analyse and document your experiences, go further by selecting more projects to assess and start to compare them. By consequence you will start to develop a 'pm excellent practise data base' for your organisation. Maybe you can start external benchmarking as well by finding other companies which do the same (see Fig. 4).

Always take really care to implement the identified areas for improvement. The improvement process does not end by documenting the findings. Usually it is just the start for comprehensive improvement activities. To secure benefits of self assessments you should define optimisation activities as a project itself. Set a project manager and team and give them free capacities and budget. Provide your top management support. Develop a data base of best practise in your company, structured by first five criteria (with 14 sub-criteria). Develop a company wide Project Benchmarking basing on criterion 6 to 9. More operational: Develop an action list or list of open points (LOP) for single projects and project management optimisation.

As a consequence of excellent management processes you should analyse the cost-benefit-ratio of your self assessments and improve your self assessments as well.

Summary of step-by-step implementation of self assessments

- Start by selecting and assessing one single project.
- Analyse and document your experiences.
- Select more projects to assess and start to compare them.
- Develop a pm best practise data base for your organisation.
- Find other companies which do the same and start external benchmarking as well.
- Always take really care to implement the identified areas for improvement.
- Analyse the cost-benefit-ratio of your self assessments and improve self assessments as well.

How to proceed with award application?

After applying the PEM to do internal assessment several times and improving your project management approach to a very high level you may think about applying for the IPMA International Project Excellence Award. To do this in a proper way you should define a project for award application. At this stage it is really recommended to join a

training for award applicants and/or assessors. Select one (or more) projects to apply and prepare the application report of the project. Together with the team lead assessor of the assessor's team from IPMA you will prepare and execute the site visit of the project. To prepare and take part on Award Gala you need to prepare a short movie and presentation of your project. Don't forget to celebrate your success and tell it to your market and customers. Afterwards you should analyse the benchmark report and develop an action list. Evaluate your project for award application, document your success and define how to go on (see Fig. 6 and Fig. 2).

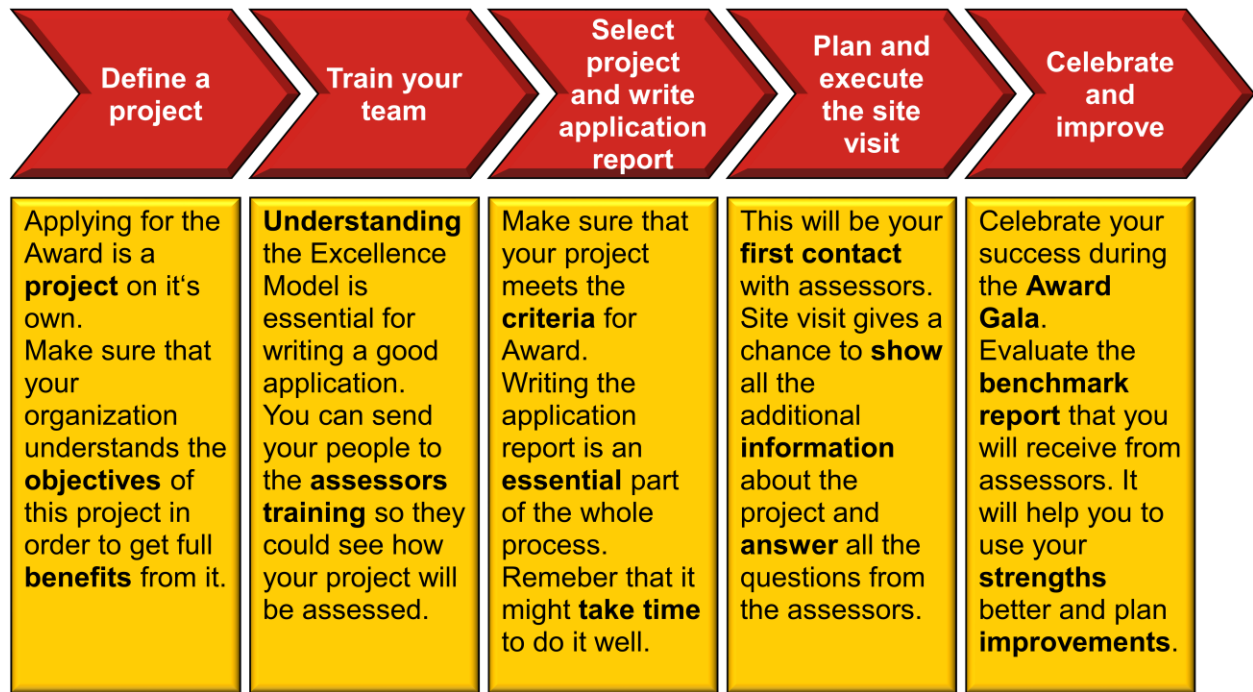


Figure 6: Phases of Award application

To apply for the Award you will have additional cost / efforts and benefits (see fig. 7). Make sure that you are aware of them and manage them consequently.

Costs / Efforts	Benefits
Write application report	You will learn a lot about your strengths and weaknesses just by preparing the application report.
Organise and execute site visit	You will get objective feedback of external assessors.
Travelling costs for the assessors to the site of the project.	You will learn a lot from questions and discussions during site visit.
Prepare and join the Award Gala	You will get a high valuable feedback / benchmark report.
Do marketing	You will get a very high public awareness.
Analyse benchmark report and define actions	You will get an official reference about your professionalism in project management.
	You will motivate your project managers and teams to be the best in your country and world wide.

Figure 7: Additional costs and benefits of award application

The Way to Project Excellence

In 2007 I developed the so called "Way to Project Excellence" and introduced this to several audiences. The basic idea is to apply the PEM not only at the end of one single project but to set it as a tool to improve the project management from the really beginning of a project.

The so called Way to Project Excellence is an internal assessment and improvement process based on PEM. You will run through the PEM from the really beginning of a project and in clearly defined periods of the project (e.g. in the beginning of each phase). Within the first five criteria (enablers) you will have a continuous improvement process of each sub-criterion by applying the PDCA-cycle. And as a consequence of the assessed results within the criteria 6 to 9 you will reflect your project management as well.

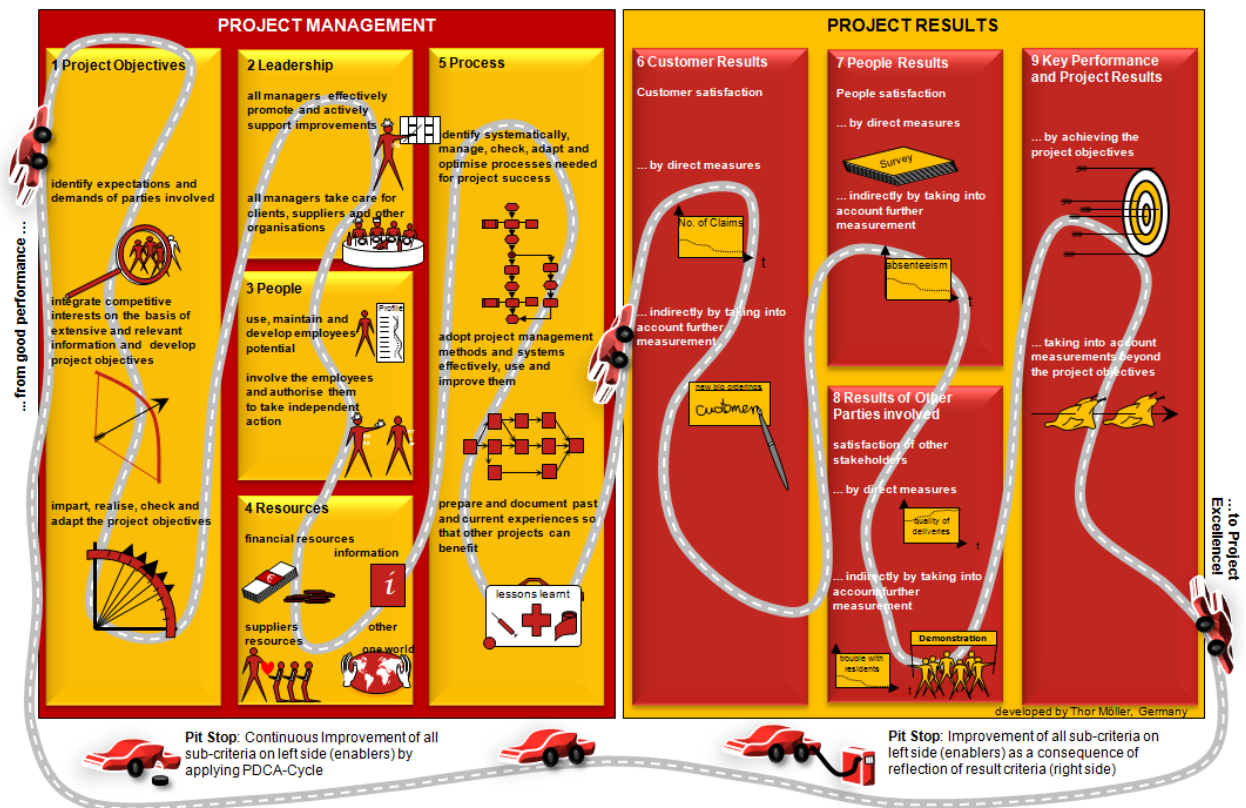


Figure 8: The Way to Project Excellence (download: <http://www.pm-experten.de/resources/ProjectManagementRoadmap+TheWaytoProjectExcellence.jpeg>)

About the author:

Dr. Thor Möller studied Economics and Business Administration at University of Bremen. Afterwards he started as a junior scientist at the Institute for Project Management and Innovation (IPMI) and finished this by up-grating to PhD in Business Administration.

At the following Thor Möller worked as the leader of department Business Administration at the German Association for Civil Construction, a leading German institution with more than 65,000 company members. Then he started as a consultant and international project manager at a middle-sized consulting company. Since 2002 he is working on his own business with con-thor Unternehmensberatung.

As a project manager, consultant or trainer Thor Möller was working in international projects e.g. in Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Albania, UK, Namibia, Brazil. Next to his work as consultant he is still working as scientist and lecturer in project management all over the world.

Additionally he is a Member of the Board of Directors of GPM German Project Management Association since 2004 and responsible for publications and project management consultants in Germany. He is also a member of the jury as well as trainer for assessors of the IPMA International Project Excellence Award and member of the IPMA Award Management Board.

Contact details:

Dr. Thor Möller, Riedenweg 21, D – 27777 Ganderkesee, Germany
Internet: www.pm-experten.de, E-mail: thor.moeller@pm-experten.de,
Phone: +49-(0)4222-946 46 77 or +49-(0)160-9473 2000