How To Successfully Create An Internal Project Management Certification Program For Your State

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Creating a certification program for your organization can increase the foundational knowledge of project management while emphasizing proven success models. Organizations which have created a certification program have reinforced project management teaching while driving project skills forward in a more efficient manner.

Creating a certification program for project management should not be misunderstood as being a degree program or something that leads into studies which will furnished a diploma. An internal project management certification program is a way of creating solid project management theories and models which will be abided by the organization and training all project managers followed with a test or some manner of verifying they have the skills. An internal certification program is not normally licensed or accredited by regional accrediting agencies, such as a university or community college. However, in this report we are suggesting that all courses used in this study be aligned with Project Management Institute (PMI®) and be registered courses which will provide Professional Development Units (PDUs) for each participant.

The following information has been designed to give you ideas and suggestions on establishing a certification program which will provide a solid framework for developing future project managers regardless of their years of experience.

What is an internal project management certification?

An internal project management certification program is designed with the goal of establishing project management standards for your organization. These standards are placed in an established curriculum to allow your organization the capability of having a course or a series of courses leading toward certification.

Internal certification programs can be created by instituting a standard course of study, along with a certification test covering the understanding of those core ideas. This certification program can be monitored and controlled within the organization with minor input from other agencies. It is suggested, however, that the certification program utilizes curriculum that has been registered and aligns with Project Management Institute. This increases the credibility of the curriculum and the certification, as well as creates standards based on a national standard of PMI® and qualifies for PDUs. PDUs are based on teaching curriculum which contains proven theories and models which align with Project Management Institute.

What are the benefits of an internal project management certification?

The benefits of creating a certification program will vary depending on the goals of the organization. There are three main benefits of an internal project management certification program.

First, the certification program establishes a standard core competency for the entire organization. The standard focuses on making sure that each project manager is trained with fundamental concepts which assist him or her in the integration of these techniques and taking them back into the workplace.

Some organizations have gone as far as to establish not only the core competencies but have created a standardized curriculum which will consist of 10 to 120 hours of training followed by a standardized certification test to verify the competency. This curriculum sets the tone and emphasizes the main theories and models needed for the organization, its culture, and the experience of its staff. In addition, this curriculum can be customized to reinforce special issues that might be experienced by the organization. For example, a government agency which has limited emphasis on procurement within their projects might adjust the curriculum to only handle those core issues that aligns with their procurement and contracting policies while another might need to reinforce all of the procurement processes as well as all sub processes.

However, you do not need to get people writing curriculum yet. You can find qualified vendors who will provide you with their curriculum which can be used in your setting.

Second, the certification program is used to separate those who want more leadership and education from individuals who are trying to get by with the least amount of effort possible. Additionally, it shows that the project manager has the capability of successfully demonstrating himself or herself in long-term training and the passing of a standardized test. This allows the organization the opportunity to emphasize professional development as well as individual achievement. Many are concerned about a certification test due to testing bias and unrealistic question content. This certification test is just one means of verifying that each participant who has gone through the training understands and has an expertise in the project management. Provisions can be created so that individuals who do not do well in a testing environment can write papers to demonstrate their competency.

The State of Missouri has created a dual track for certification with this in mind. If the person makes under a 70% on their certification test, they have the opportunity to write a series of papers to show their expertise and gain certification.

Third, the certification program is used as a method to align your organization with Project Management Institute, which is an international standard for project management. The alignment of the certification program to PMI® standards gives the coursework and certification test validation. The certification program assists the

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sponsoring organization in having a list of qualified project managers to be appointed to future projects. This allows the organization the opportunity of tracking who is qualified to run future projects and to reduce the potential of failure. This validation is repeated each time the project managers continue their educational process with mandated hours to remain certified. These hours can range from 10 to 30 hours per year. Most certification programs have established a variety of ways for individuals to be able to pick up the necessary hours. In some cases, one has been able to make a presentation on the topic of project management, study a new textbook on the subject and demonstrate competency in this area or take courses that are already registered with PMI[®]. Determining how a person can recertify and establishing the number of hours needed is very important for keeping your project managers up to date, as well as maintaining project management as a priority for your organization.

The following process can assist in giving you a better idea of how to use project management training to create Best Practices which will drive new culture into your organization.

The process below begins with a definition of the training process that will be followed, along with indicators that will be measured to confirm that the training is of the quality desired. You will notice that the various data has been collected and analyzed to see which areas can improve the functionality of your organization, running projects, and making sure you are as efficient as possible. Once that information has been analyzed and specific processes have been defined for improvement, the organization will then take steps to begin implementing these new processes. In the last section of this process, the Best Practices will be created and adjusted at a later time to maintain their accuracy.

Process For Changing Organizational Culture

Process For Changing Organizational Culture With Project Best Practices
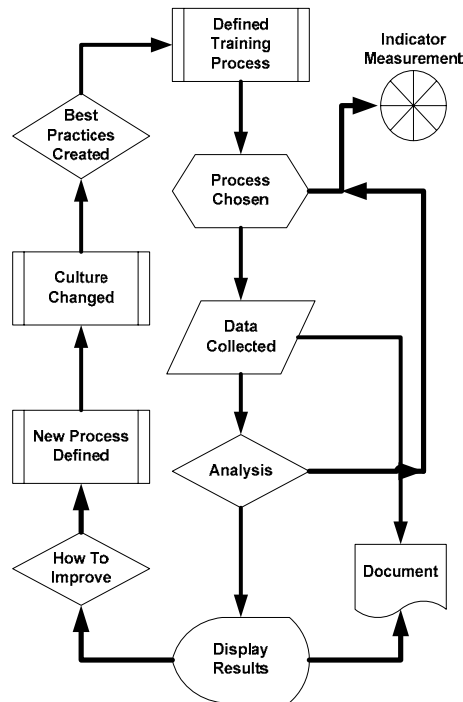
What should be included in course content?

The course content for this program is very important. The goal of project management training is to establish the foundational core skills that each project manager must possess in the culture of your organization. One of the best ideas for developing course content and establishing your own certification program is to make sure that the content aligns with PMI®'s standards, which allows you to know for sure that they are following mainline processes which can benefit the organization and has already been proven and tested through history.

The course content will normally include general management theory, project management principles, risk management, communication management, human resource management, negotiation, budgeting, procurement, earned value, and integration of project management into the normal internal processes of the organization. You will also need detailed guidance on the five process groups of project management which are

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emphasized by PMI®. Each section of the content must be aligned with the view of supporting projects rather than general content in each area. This means that risk management would go beyond the general understanding of the Band-Aid approach and must focus on a strong mitigation model to prevent risks from coming about, as well as create contingencies that can be followed when the risk happens. Furthermore, the same curriculum would focus on project communication as a matter of informing and distributing the proper information throughout the whole life cycle of the project.
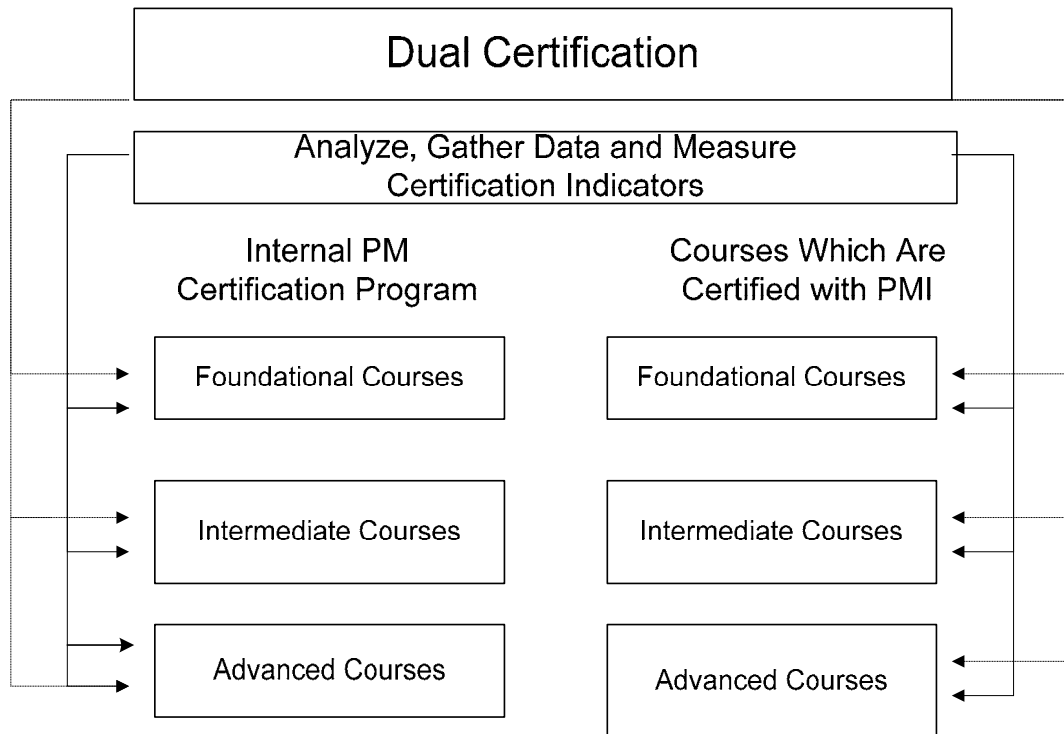
In addition to content, the course must have solid hands-on activities which will allow the participants the opportunity to apply what they are learning as fast as possible.

What certification body should this course align with for standardization?

Certification bodies all have their foundational principles and standards which have been publicized as a way of separating themselves and their focus. For this type of project it is best for the organization to make sure all course work has been certified with PMI®. The main reason for doing this is to make sure that the coursework is following project management theories and to reduce any future problems as this certification program grows. By aligning all course work with PMI®, the organization knows that the training is founded on solid information and will support future certifications such as the Certified Associate Project Manager (CAPM®) or the Project Management Professional (PMP®). The CAPM® and the PMP® are both global certifications which are offered through PMI®. These certifications are based on standards known as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®).

If you make sure all of your courses are registered with PMI® you will reduce the chance that your workers will need to retake courses in the future. This will save you money in the long run.

Comparing Dual Certification

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│                   Dual Certification                      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

    ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
    │        Analyze, Gather Data and Measure          │
    │            Certification Indicators               │
    └─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

         Internal PM                    Courses Which Are
    Certification Program               Certified with PMI

    ┌──────────────────────┐       ┌──────────────────────┐
    │  Foundational Courses │       │  Foundational Courses │
    └──────────────────────┘       └──────────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────────────┐       ┌──────────────────────┐
    │  Intermediate Courses │       │  Intermediate Courses │
    └──────────────────────┘       └──────────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────────────┐       ┌──────────────────────┐
    │   Advanced Courses    │       │   Advanced Courses    │
    └──────────────────────┘       └──────────────────────┘
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Project Management Institute is experiencing an enormous amount of growth as more and more organizations see the value in the lining their curriculum with the standards. In 2006, over 100,000 people specialized with a PMP® certification throughout the world. This certification has become the fourth most requested certification worldwide.

What kind of assessment should be used to certify the participants?

Creating an assessment for certifying the participants after training is very important. One of the best ways of doing this is to establish a certification which is following some type of foundational information, such as the organization's Best Practices of project management. Establishing a certification around the Best Practices of an organization allows it the opportunity to emphasize this material as their standard for running projects. It also allows each employee the opportunity to learn a set piece of curriculum that is owned and controlled by the organization. One of the first things that one might do is create a best practice for that organization. This is normally done over a period of time and will go through several revisions in order to deepen it. This is a living document that also is usable in the average project. The Best Practices can be updated based on the feedback of the participants in the certification program.

Guidelines for assessing the participants in their knowledge base of project management should be the following:

1. Make sure the test dates are given at the beginning of the course so that all participants have time to clear their schedules.

2. Create a test in a multiple choice fashion focusing on the current curriculum which is being taught.

3. Prior to giving the test to the participants, it should be reviewed by an oversight committee, project management office, or executive management to check it for biases.

4. Use words which can be understood by all participants—limit the usage of large, difficult terms unless they are part of the curriculum.

5. Make sure all course material and the certification test align with the same topics, theories and models as what is supported by the organization.

6. Allow participants to have at least one minute per question on the certification test to prevent the missing of unnecessary questions. For example, allow two hours for a hundred question certification test or four hours for a two hundred question test.

7. Establish the minimum score that must be obtained to pass and publicize it to all participants prior to test day.

8. Create an alternative mechanism, such as writing papers, for those individuals who struggle with taking formal tests. This should only happen if the participants scores below the minimum.

This test must be kept in a safe, confidential place to maintain its integrity with only very few people having access to the answers.

What administrative guidelines should be in place for internal project management certification?

Administrative guidelines for running your own internal certification must take into account that many of these project managers will need to recertify after a short period of time—normally within two to four years. The basic guidelines for the administration of this type of certification program can be simplified and conducted in-house or through an outside vendor who provides the training and oversight of the certification.

Administration of this type of program should include the capability to track all project managers, the date of their certification, and the date they must recertify. It is important

to make sure that all project managers have the capability of tracking their own hours within this database with their own individual access which shows documentation for the various courses they have taken.

First, it is extremely important that both the training personnel and the certification personnel work together to make sure there are no gaps between what is being taught and what is being presented on the certification test. Gaps in the curriculum will frustrate the participants and cause the program to lose credibility.

Second, there must be the creation of a series of short term courses to expand the depth of the project managers. This means the creation of one-day to multiple-day courses which will give more depth than the standard curriculum. For example, a person could take a three-day course on project communication management and learn how to document and distribute all the project documents to the various stakeholders throughout the communication plan.

The following process can assist you in monitoring and evaluating the project management certification. The first step of this process is to establish a monitoring and evaluation process which will be followed throughout the course of the study. Second, you will create quality standards which will be influenced due to feedback from stakeholders as well as past evaluations of participants. Third, you will set up a monitoring schedule which will be used as a method of checking on the training itself. For instance, a series of drop-in visits by an organizational representative should take place during the training events as a means of monitoring and evaluating what the participants are going through, such as activities and depth of the content. Fourth, there should be the conducting of audits which are influenced by documents, surveys and interviews to verify that the project management content is meeting all requirements as desired. Fifth, all the data will be analyzed with recommendations given so the adjustments to the program and content can be made to benefit the organization.

Administration guidelines will need to be created and adjusted throughout the entire program. There needs to be enough guidance to control the program and maintain high quality, but not so much that will cause the program to bog down or keep you from being creative.

Process For Monitoring
And Evaluation PM Certification
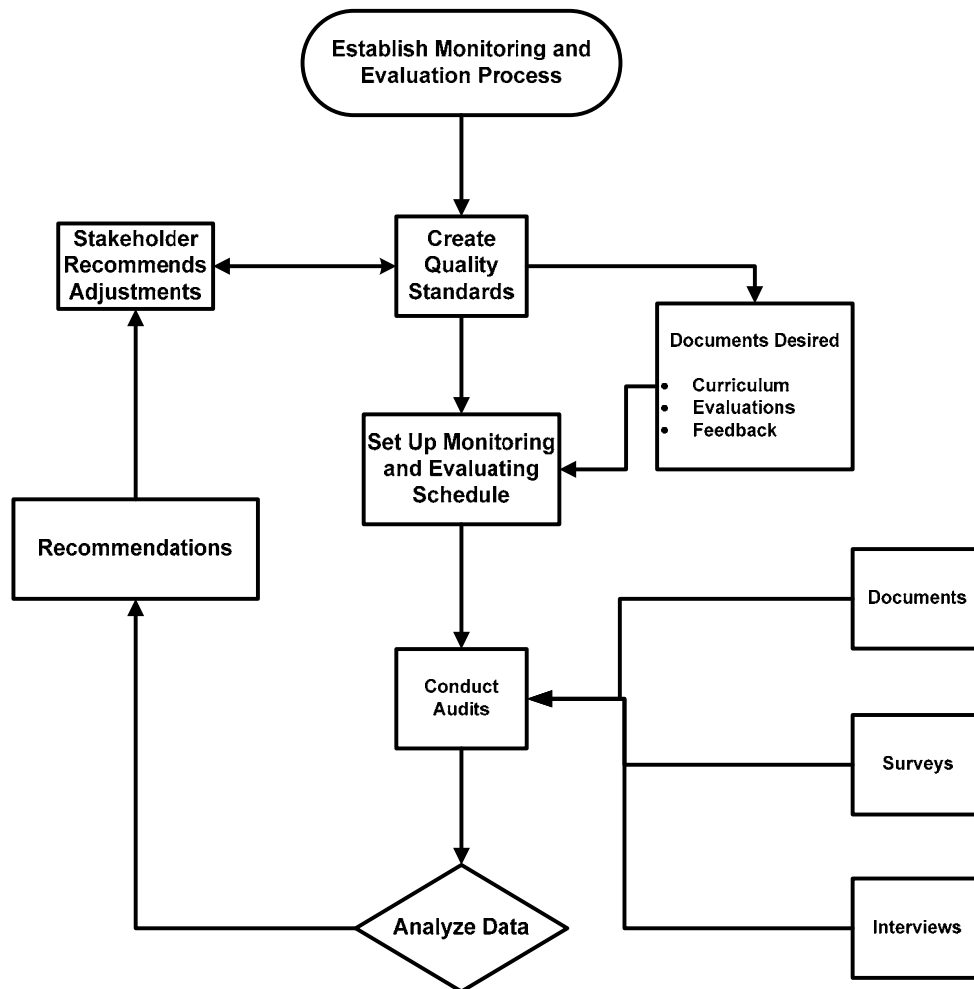
As you can see, this process for monitoring the project management certification can take place internally or with the help of an external vendor. Regardless of which method is used for delivering the training, it is possible for the organization to follow this process with little or no major adjustments.

What guidelines should be in place for recertification?

Recertifying the project manager is part of maintaining a growing understanding of the field of project management. This does not mean that the project manager must take

another certification test nor does it mean that a project manager must go back through the core curriculum over and over again as they did during the original certification. Recertification is a way to prevent a project manager from certifying and then deciding that they are no longer going to continue to grow with new ideas and techniques in the field of project management.

When establishing the number of hours which must be obtained over a length of time for recertification most organizations use a variety of resources. Some organizations have allowed participants attending certain associational meetings to contribute toward recertification; as well as reading books, making presentations, and taking additional courses. If you set up your recertification guidelines to follow the PMI® standard, it will minimize confusion of your staff when they do finally test for the PMP® certification. Also, if you make sure that all the short term courses used for recertification are registered for PDUs with PMI®, each participant can keep their organizational certification and their project management certification updated at the same time.

Project Management Institute states that once a person has become a Project Management Professional, they must pick up 60 PDUs within a three year time period. The state of Missouri has followed the same standard for all their project managers. You can do this as well if you make sure your vendor is a REP (Registered Educational Provider) and is willing to teach courses which are certified with PMI® as part of your contract.

On last thing to consider is if your REP is a certified Project Management Professional they can teach PMP® Exam Prep Boot Camps for your staff. By hiring a vendor which can run PMP® Exam Prep Boot Camps, you will find a person who can assist your staff move deeper into using project management models and theories. The PMP® was defined earlier, but this international certification is very important to the project management world. It is being taken by 8,000 to 10,000 people monthly. Many states are beginning to pay for PMP® training and certification for their employees. If you have a vendor which can do both, you will reduce the chances of your staff having to go elsewhere for training. The normal PMP® Exam Prep Boot Camp cost is around $2,500 per participant. The length is normally four extended hour days so the participants can qualify for the 35 contact hours needed to take the PMP® certification test. In government, the price should be around $1,600 to $1,700 per person for face-to-face instruction. You can reduce this through CD Exam Prep or online courses. Lastly, make sure you check out the guarantee of the organization on the PMP® Exam Prep Boot Camp. Each vendor normally has some type of guarantee. In our case, we know how to train each person with solid skills for passing. If a vendor is not willing to give a guarantee for this, you probably should seek out other suppliers.

What concerns must be examined before implementing a certification program?

When implementing a certification program one should make sure that he or she has done a thorough job in examining any potential hurdles that will be faced. The following

information is given only to highlight some of the main concerns that must be examined when setting up a program such as this. Your specific organization might have more or less issues to be resolved than discussed in this report.

First, there must be a long-term commitment to project management training. Setting up a certification program can only work and benefit the organization if there is a long-term commitment to providing the training. Nothing will devastate the people more than to have them go through the initial certification only to have the organization abandon the program in the weeks and months ahead. Long-term focus allows you time to bring your people along in understanding project management. The steady ability to drive your organization in this direction will allow you to take baby steps toward the goal over a long period of time.

Second, there must be a strong project management team to oversee the certification process. The project management team overseeing the certification process must be individuals who have a strong background in project management and who understand and support the establishment of strong project managers for greater efficiency. If a team member is not supportive, either verbally or by actions, he or she must be pulled from the oversight team or else hinder your goals of educating others in project management.

The project management team can be used to not only guide the certification process, its curriculum, and its operating procedures, but it can also monitor and make sure the program is reaching the intended goal, as well as create the Best Practices, which should be the foundation of your certification test.

Third, there must be a transition plan put into place to get your certification program going if you need to create a best practice. The transition period is sometimes very clumsy because you are testing project managers on project management concepts without having a foundational best practice for yourself. The best thing you can do during this period is to use your participants to help create some of the chapters and templates that will later evolve into the Best Practices.

Some are hesitant because they assume it will take years to bring this about. In some cases it is very possible to create a working draft of the Best Practices within nine or 10 months, while still teaching project management curriculum.

Fourth, there must be a commitment to find Registered Education Providers who can align and certify the curriculum to PMI® standards. A registered education provider can be found by going to the PMI® website (www.PMI.org). PMI® has a listing of Registered Education Providers throughout the world. At the present time, there are approximately 680 REPs within North America. This allows your organization the opportunity to know that you are getting someone who understands the certification process and has taken the necessary steps to register all courses in this manner.

Be extremely careful in taking a Registered Education Provider who has little or no courses documented with PMI®. There are many individuals who have no courses

registered. This individual will limit your certification program because they have a very narrow focus of project management, and they lack future resources because they have not developed additional courses which will be very important in the long-term development of your employees.

The Mathis Group can assist you in developing your own internal certification program. The Mathis Group is one of 680 Registered Education Providers throughout North America. We have 33 courses which are all certified with PMI®. We have provided project management training to numerous industries, government agencies and states. We also have a four-year contract with the State of Missouri to provide project managers with 120 hours of project management training leading toward their certification.

The Mathis Group can assist you in developing your certification program; provide all training and create a certification test or assessment which will allow you to educate your staff with solid project management principles in a very short time. In addition, we can give guidance to your project management team and established procedures that will assist them in maintaining a strong certification program along with solid curriculum for proper teaching.

In summary, there are five main reasons for creating a certification program for project management in your state agency.

1.   To make your project run faster and be more successful
2.   To create a better usage of resources and tax dollars
3.   To keep communication open and clear throughout the project
4.   To track the vendors who are doing project on behalf of the state
5.   To provide tools for project managers to use

As we conclude this report I hope you will be encouraged to create your own certification program for project management. You will see the main benefit for creating a certification program is not the program itself, but to run projects faster and with less risk of failure.

PMI, CAPM, PMP, and PMBOK are registered marks of the Project Management Institute, Inc.

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Over the last several years, Dr. Keith Mathis has emerged as one of the most effective business trainers in the field traveling throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and South America. His provocative, informative, humorous presentations on a variety of organizational development topics are demanded by progressive companies. An animated and often electrifying platform speaker, Keith never merely talks to an audience, but he also seeks to involve them in his presentations through high content and numerous illustrations. Intellectually demanding of himself, Keith demands no less of his audiences!

As a consultant who specializes in organizational behavior and development, he comes with thousands of presentations to every kind of organization. He is flexible by teaching in full day formats, multi-day conferences or one hour keynotes for conventions.

He is founder of The Mathis Group, based in St. Louis, Missouri. His work includes teaching corporate America skills on topics such as: teambuilding, leadership, motivation, conflict resolution, project management, supervision, performance appraisals, goal setting and numerous other organizational proficiencies. His problem solving expertise provides him with the ability to help companies in the solving of the most complex difficulties.

Keith continues to broaden his knowledge base and practical advice by teaching. He serves as an adjunct professor of business/management at Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, teaching Consulting, Public Speaking, Total Quality,

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Project Management, Management, Communication, Customer Value, Leadership, Marketing, Organizational Behavior, Strategic Planning, and Group Dynamics.

Keith has authored numerous training programs as well as magazine and newspaper articles. His book *Dinosaur Tracks: Modern Leadership Strategies for Changing Employee Performance and Behavior* was published by Equippers Press International.

Keith holds a B.A. in Behavioral Science, a M.S. in Management, and a Ph.D. in Administration Management. He is certified as a PMP (Project Management Professional) and a COI (Certified Online Instructor).