



Karen Dittmann • Konstantin Dirbanis

Project Management (IPMA®)

Study Guide for Level D and GPM Basislevel®

3rd Edition

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Bibliographical Information of the German National Library

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography.
Detailed bibliographical data can be accessed on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

Print:	ISBN 978-3-648-19310-5	Order no. 10621-0003
ePub:	ISBN 978-3-648-19314-3	Order no. 10621-0102
ePDF:	ISBN 978-3-648-19315-0	Order no. 10621-0152

Karen Dittmann/Konstantin Dirbanis

Project Management (IPMA®)

3rd, updated and revised edition, June 2026

© 2026 Haufe-Lexware GmbH & Co. KG

Munzinger Str. 9, 79111 Freiburg, Germany

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Product Management: Bettina Noé

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Welcome to the book!

This book serves as an introduction to project management for those interested in the subject. It covers the foundational knowledge required for the »IPMA Level D« course or the »GPM Basislevel« course. However, you can also read it to gain an initial understanding of how project management works in practice.

This book is based on the current version of the IPMA® international project management standard (ICB4.0, or Individual Competence Baseline), as well as the further national developments by GPM in 2023 and 2025. The ICB4.0 international standard is divided into three competence areas. Accordingly, this book is also divided into these three competence areas and color-coded accordingly:

- Competence Area »Perspective« (Context)
- Competence Area »People« (Personal and Social)
- Competence Area »Practice« (Methods and Technical)

The three competence areas mentioned above are further subdivided into different competence elements (CE) in the ICB. These elements have a standard numbering system in ICB4.0. In this book, we have adopted the standard numbering of the CE abbreviations in brackets. This ensures that the contents of the book refer to the current version of ICB4.0. Read more about ICB4.0 and other project management standards in Chapter 1.2.7 Project Management Standards.

The IPMA® standard is **hybrid**. It contains both **traditional** (plan-based) and **agile** (value-based) methods and capabilities. In this book, the terms »traditional« and »plan-based« are used as synonyms. Traditional project management is a well-established, long-standing term that will not easily be erased from the minds of project managers. However, plan-based project management is now the more accurate term, especially in contrast to agile project management, where detailed long-term plans tend to be less important.

Content related to agile or hybrid project management is marked with this symbol.



Text passages in italics without references are either extracted from Motzel's Project Management Lexicon or are original definitions by the authors. All other quotations are presented in italics and include a source reference. Definitions are additionally marked in gray boxes.

In this book, we have incorporated our many years of training and practical experience with regard to the content, methodologies, and didactics. In doing so, we support you in exploring the extraordinarily complex topic of project management.

The download area of the book offers numerous templates for practical use, providing a foundation for your individual project work.

Project managers strive for optimum efficiency. They use state-of-the-art methods, procedures, and systems to ensure the required functions, qualities, time, and costs are met. They only take on tasks that match their experience and expertise. Project managers take timely action to avoid project disruptions. They report openly and honestly on conflicts of objectives and project problems.

To improve their own skills and keep up to date with the latest knowledge, project managers are constantly learning. They also provide team members and employees with opportunities for professional development and training. They ensure fair cooperation and objective criticism of themselves, team members, and other project participants. At the same time, they protect team members and project participants from unjustified criticism. Their behavior is always objective and balanced.

Integrity

Project managers adhere to the law and generally accept social values wherever they work. In their actions and decisions, they always strive to prevent harm to the welfare of society. They are prepared to be accountable for their actions.

In all their actions and decisions, project managers maintain their independence and neutrality and are loyal trustees of their customers. They respect the confidentiality of information and protect copyrights. They strictly reject any form of undue influence and refrain from exerting improper influence themselves.

Project managers take full responsibility for their actions and decisions. Their professional standing is based on their own performance. They do not compete with others in an unfair or dishonest manner.

Adherence to these principles determines the status and social recognition of the individual project manager and the profession.

GPM (2021). Code of Ethics of the GPM German Association for Project Management e. V.

1.5.2 Traditional versus Agile Values

In this textbook, we examine not only traditional project management, but also agile project management and **hybrid approaches** that combine both. Since these approaches have different values, we first describe them separately and then compare how they are used in hybrid projects.

1.5.2.1 Traditional Values

Based on our consulting experience and the codes of ethics of GPM and PMI, we have summarized the key values of traditional project management (Dittmann/Zaeri Esfahani, 2023):

- **Planning certainty**

At the beginning of a project, a project plan is created. This plan forms the basis for deciding whether to start the project. Once approved and communicated, the project follows this

plan. All participants adhere to it so that the project can be carried out successfully. Changes are made in a controlled and documented way.

- **Clear allocation of responsibilities within the organization**

The roles of the project manager, project owner, and project team are clearly defined, with a structured reporting line. The customer or project owner makes strategic decisions, while the project manager and the team handle operational decisions. Responsibility covers both decisions made and not made, as well as their consequences.

- **Reliability**

Decisions are made clearly and commitments are kept. All parties act in a predictable manner and try to avoid unnecessary surprises.

- **Triad: Fairness, respect, honesty**

These values are regarded as fundamental ethical principles and are expected of everyone involved. This includes legal compliance and adherence to internal company rules. Violations are sanctioned in order to prevent future misconduct.

- **Measuring success based on project objectives**

Project management success is measured against the project objectives defined at the beginning of the project. These objectives guide the project and are reviewed at the end.

Product success is measured by benefits and can only be assessed after the project is completed. This assessment is the responsibility of the project owner. Therefore, it is not a direct measure of project success, but rather relates to the business case, which can only be fully evaluated after project completion.

- **Central management role of the project manager**

The project manager plays a central role in traditional projects. Especially in matrix and pure project organizations, the project manager acts as the main leader, knowledge holder, decision-maker, and driving force of the project.

1.5.2.2 Agile Mindset

The fundamental approach to agile collaboration is based on agile values, principles, and behaviors. This attitude is often described as an **agile mindset** that develops over time. An agile mindset is characterized by uncertainty of outcomes and constant change. Agile values, guiding principles, as well as our approach to our own work, serve us as a compass to help us navigate these challenges.



When faced with a critical situation, healthy people typically respond to stress in three phases:

1. **Alarm phase:** The situation is perceived as stressful.
2. **Action phase:** Physical resources are activated for **fight or flight**.
3. **Recovery phase:** The body restores its **chemical balance**.

The recovery phase is essential for maintaining health. If critical situations occur too frequently and with too little time in between, recovery is insufficient. Over time, this can lead to illness, often referred to as burnout. Prolonged or excessive stress can also result in cardiovascular diseases.

According to studies by Lüschor (2011) and Müller-Ettrich (2014), people working in projects – especially project managers – are exposed to particularly high levels of stress. The authors identify the following reasons:

- **Constant new demands** from outside the project
- High levels of **creative freedom** combined with **responsibility**
- Being in a »**sandwich position**« between line management and the steering committee or project owner
- A project-**unfriendly organizational environment**, including:
 - Competition between projects for resources and attention
 - Dependence on factors that cannot be influenced (e.g., unavailable technology)
 - Power structures within the organization that work against the project
 - Lack of understanding of the project at the management level
 - Insufficiently trained project staff
 - Missing or unavailable key resources

Stressors differ from person to person. What one individual experiences as stressful may be motivating for another. Stress must therefore always be assessed individually. Self-reflection helps to identify personal stressors and develop effective individual strategies for dealing with them.

2.1.4 Personal Competence Development in Project Management

2.1.4.1 Career Planning in Three Approaches

Since this is a textbook on project management, career planning is presented using three approaches based on project planning principles.

Option 1: Traditional, Plan-Based Approach

Similar to the waterfall model, this approach involves planning a career in advance and then achieving defined milestones step by step.

The starting point is to define clear **career objectives**, for example:

- A **middle management** position
- Managing **large or complex projects**
- **Self-employment** as a consultant

From the defined objectives, the required steps are planned backwards.

Which milestones need to be reached along the way?

Option 2: Pure Intuition

In this approach, decisions are guided mainly by gut feeling. It offers maximum flexibility, as there are no predefined milestones that might limit opportunities.

This approach works best for people who are highly reflective, understand their own development well, and are able to recognize and avoid distorting influences, such as:

- being driven mainly by **money**,
- **overestimating or underestimating** one's own abilities,
- **blindly following** a charismatic leader.

A major risk of this approach is losing the long-term perspective and gradually becoming directionless.

Option 3: Agile Life Planning

This approach combines the strengths of Option 1 and Option 2. The agile cycle of transparency, review, and adaptation accompanies career development and allows for maximum flexibility.

- A **vision** is developed to provide direction. This vision acts as a »**North Star**.«
- The **next steps** toward this vision are planned in concrete terms (**transparency**), while keeping the option to **adjust them (flexibility)**.
- Regular pauses are taken to **reflect on, review, and adapt** priorities and actions. These can be scheduled at regular **intervals**, for example yearly, on birthdays, or during holidays.
- The outcome of each reflection is a set of **concrete actions** for the next phase (**cadence**).

The most important element of this approach is transparency. This means not only thinking about goals, but also writing them down, visualizing them, and seeking regular feedback from others.

2.1.4.2 The IPMA® 4-Level Model

The **IPMA® Project Management Certification** is a **personal certification**. Project professionals can qualify for and obtain internationally recognized certification at the different ascending certification levels throughout their project management career.

2.2.4.1 ESG Criteria as a Benchmark

ESG criteria – short for **environmental**, **social**, and **governance** – are an established framework for assessing corporate sustainability. They are based on the **EU Directive on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**, which was transposed into German law in 2017. Since then, rating agencies have evaluated companies, among other aspects, based on how well they meet ESG requirements.

Projects can also be assessed using these criteria (see Chapter 1.3.4).

2.2.4.2 The Three-Pillar Model of Sustainability

Ecological aspects in project management focus on the environmentally friendly design of processes and results. This includes:

- reducing physical documentation through digital solutions,
- using resource-efficient and sustainable materials and processes, and
- consciously considering the environmental impact of project results, including their effects beyond the project lifecycle.

Social aspects of project management relate to respectful and responsible collaboration within the team and with stakeholders. These values include reliability, trust, transparency, and a positive error culture.

They also include:

- **fair working conditions** and appreciation,
- the appropriate and **competent use of project personnel**,
- **respect** for diversity, and
- **consideration of psychological stress** on employees.

Sustainable project work involves active stakeholder engagement, compliance with legal requirements, and responsible behavior by the project owner.

Governance Aspects (Governance) in project management refer to the responsible, structured, and sustainable use of resources, especially human resources. Effective governance addresses challenges such as time constraints, complexity, and uncertainty through:

- clear **processes**,
- stable **management structures**, and
- realistic **planning**.

This includes project portfolio management, preventive risk management, appropriate project design, and consistent standard definitions and applications.

As part of a learning organization, sustainable governance supports continuous learning and continuous improvement (CIP).

Environment 	Social affairs 	Economics 
- Promotion of environmentally friendly solutions in the project context - Reduction of physical documentation through digital ways of working - Use of sustainable materials and manufacturing processes - Consideration of ecological impacts of project outputs and outcomes (impact & outcome)	- Lived values such as reliability, trust, and transparency - Establishment of a positive error culture within the project team - Provision of fair working conditions and psychological relief for employees - Competence-based resource allocation and consideration of diversity - Active involvement of stakeholders - Recognition of and adherence to social standards	- Responsible use of resources, especially human resources - Use of standards, processes, and structured project management methods - Application of project portfolio management as a steering instrument - Preventive and methodical risk management - Appropriate project design to reduce unnecessary complexity - Promotion of continuous learning and continuous improvement (CIP)

Fig. 25: Three-pillar model of sustainability

2.2.4.3 Comparison of ESG and the Three-Pillar Model

Both the three-pillar model of sustainability and the ESG criteria aim to take a **holistic view of sustainability**. They share the core idea that sustainable development is only possible when ecological, social, and economic aspects are considered together. This common foundation is their strength. However, the two models differ clearly in their origins, purpose, and practical use.

The **three-pillar model** was developed mainly as an ethical and normative framework. It is often used in political sustainability strategies, education, and general discussions about sustainable development. Its goal is to provide guidance and raise awareness of balanced development across the three dimensions. In contrast, the **ESG criteria** have become a practical management and evaluation framework in the business context. They are used, for example, in sustainability reporting, investment decisions, ratings, and project evaluations.

The following table provides an overview of these differences:

Feature	Three-pillar model	ESG criteria
Objective	Sustainable development through balancing the three areas	Assessment of corporate sustainability and risks
Dimensions	Ecology, social issues, economy	Environment, social issues, governance
Application	Model in politics, education, society, projects	Practical tool for companies, investors, ratings agencies
Focus on »Economy«	Cost-effectiveness, efficiency	Corporate governance, transparency, compliance, ethics
Origin	Sustainability debate, Brundtland Report	Capital market, CSR strategies, EU regulation

Tab. 11: The Three-Pillar Model vs. ESG Criteria

Unfreezing

- Preparation for change
- Communication of objectives and plans
- Involvement of affected stakeholders
 - Initial analysis
 - Dismantling existing structures and processes

Changing

- Implementation of the change by the responsible parties
- Reinforcement through training and qualifications
- Supporting communication measures
- Gaining acceptance by clearly demonstrating the benefits to affected employees

Refreezing

- Organizational change
- Full integration into new structures and processes
- Completion to achieve a stable and sustainable state

3.5.10.2 Communication in Change Processes

Change projects are especially demanding for organizations because they not only affect new structures, processes, or systems, but above all people. Roles, routines, and attitudes are influenced. In this context, communication is a key success factor.

Communication is not limited to the exchange of information. It strongly shapes understanding, acceptance, and involvement of those affected. Effective communication helps reduce uncertainty, builds trust, increases the willingness to change and supports acceptance of the change among the relevant stakeholders.

Key functions of communication in change projects include:

- **Transparency:** Objectives, background, and benefits of the change are explained clearly.
- **Acceptance:** Stakeholders understand not only *what* will change, but also *why* and *how*.
- **Managing resistance:** Open dialogue helps identify and address concerns.
- **Orientation:** Regular communication shows the current project status, achieved results, and next steps.
- **Motivation:** Appreciative communication strengthens trust and commitment.
- **Consistency:** Clear and consistent messages ensure a shared understanding among all involved.

Communication planning based on stakeholder analysis

To be effective, communication must be planned systematically. The basis for this is stakeholder analysis. It identifies which stakeholder groups (for example, managers, employees,

customers, or employee representatives) are relevant to the change project, what their interests and expectations are, and how much influence they have.

Medium/Channel	Communication Objective	Stakeholders/Target Group	Key Content/Message
Town hall meeting, intranet, newsletter	Provide information and build acceptance	Employees (broad audience)	Why the change is necessary, benefits of the new software, impact on daily work, company, and strategy
Management workshop, email updates, guidelines	Strengthen multiplier role	Managers/team leaders	Role in the change process, support options, handling resistance
Regular project meetings, project management tool	Ensure transparency and coordination	Project team	Project status, open issues, next steps
Regular meetings, documents, personal discussions	Ensure co-determination	Works council/employee representatives	Project objectives, impact on working conditions, planned measures
Customer newsletter, website, information events	Build trust and confidence	Customers/external stakeholders	Timeline, benefits for service quality, possible limitations, innovation capability, future viability
Steering committee, management report	Overview and decision-making	Top management	Status, budget, risks, success factors, link to corporate strategy

Tab. 84: Communication management plan (change project)



3.6 Closure (4.5.10)

Start:

- All deliverables meet the required quality standards.
- The steering committee formally approves the completion of the project.

Focus:

- Value creation level: Product acceptance and handover
- Management level: Closure analysis and project closure
- Team level: Team dissolution and appreciation of the team (psychological factor and recognition), capturing project learning for future projects (lessons learned)

List of Technical Terms German-English/ English-German

Project managers often use various terms, synonyms, and idioms. There can be differences in terminology between American and British project managers, as well as variations between organizations such as IPMA® and PMI.

The list of technical terms in our book is the result of extensive discussions with colleagues and research of relevant literature. It does not claim to be exhaustive or entirely accurate. It is intended as an aid for German project managers working in an English-speaking environment and English-speaking project managers working in a German environment.

The authors

German – English

DE	EN
Ablagestruktur	filing structure
Ablauf- und Terminplanung	project scheduling
Ablauforganisation	process organization
Ablaufplanung	process planning
Abnahme	acceptance
Abnahmekriterien	acceptance criteria
Abnahmeprüfung	acceptance inspection
Abwicklungserfolg	project success
AGBs	terms and conditions
agil	agile
aktives Zuhören	active listening
AKV (Aufgabe, Kompetenz, Verantwortung)	TAR (task, authority, responsibility)
Anfang-Anfang-Beziehung	start-to-start relationship
Anfangsfolge	start relationship
Anforderung	requirement

About the authors



Dr. Karen Dittmann is an entrepreneur, consultant, and coach specializing in project management. She runs the consulting firm PM Dittmann, is an authorized training partner, course provider, and accredited trainer of the GPM and guides project managers of all levels through the qualification system according to the IPMA® standard. Together with her colleague, Konstantin Dirbanis, she runs the training platform »Better Project Training«. Their objective is to enable project managers and organizations to manage their projects successfully. They always keep in mind that the focus is on the people involved.



Dr. h.c. Konstantin Dirbanis is a freelance consultant, trainer, and coach for project management, with over 34 years of experience in the finance, automotive, pharmaceuticals, and aviation industries. He runs the consulting firm Bulbb GmbH and is a Certified Trainer in project management (CT) with IPMA. He has already accompanied more than 1,200 people earn their IPMA® certification. Together with Dr. Karen Dittmann, he runs the training platform »Better Project Training«. His guiding principle is: »People make the projects, not the tools – but they are valuable aids!«



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