

# Evaluating Certified Public Manager Training

*Learn how managers have used a variety of methods to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate structure, processes, and outcomes of the CPM program in New Jersey.*

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In her recent article in this journal, Ellen Bates introduces readers to the Certified Public Manager (CPM) program: its history, philosophy, structure, and education-training protocols. She notes that several critical guidelines were promulgated at the onset of this program, particularly requirements for competency examination, continuous relationships with graduates, and an official and broadly representative board to oversee overall operations.

CPM was thus spawned with structural elements that require deliberate evaluation and monitoring processes. This article discusses evaluative protocols that are used in New Jersey. These evaluative strategies are well suited to the broad array of public-sector management education and training initiatives.

## Background

In January 1983, New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean signed Executive Order 28, which established the state's CPM program. This comprehensive training and development program was intended to improve the quality and professionalism of the state's managers and supervisors. Over the past twenty-two years, many things have changed as a result of evolving management knowledge, skills, and technologies. In addition, the needs of the sponsoring agencies in government, as well as the individual participants, have changed. CPM has extensively evaluated the six levels of instruction to respond to, and stay at the forefront of, these changes.

## Evaluation as a Comprehensive Process

CPM uses comprehensive, sophisticated, and useful evaluation methods. Assessment of learning progress, competency outcomes, and curriculum design and implementation is built into every element of the training and education experience. Evaluation covers the assessment of the specific learning of a participant (the public-sector manager who is taking the course and is thus a student), cohorts of students, domains of government, and the overall program itself.

Evaluation of learning, in terms of competency outcomes as well as educational processes, comprises a series of feedback loops that increase in size and scope with regard to individual students, as well as the program itself. The schema is formative—what we should be doing, learning, and so forth; summative—what was or was not taught and learned; quantitative—statistical measurement of efficacy and efficiency; and qualitative—perceptions and recommendations. Evaluation focuses on micro topics (individual students, specialized areas of course content); macro topics (large-scale, overall competencies); rational, as well as humanistic

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emphases; short- and long-term outcomes; and responsiveness to the needs and demands of direct and indirect stakeholders, including students, teachers, government agencies that sponsor students, and citizenry. In other words, the program practices what it teaches.

The aforementioned dimensions of the evaluation schema are, obviously, interrelated. Conceptualized deliberately, however, they simultaneously allow for immediate adjustments regarding the learning of respective students, incremental adjustments to curriculum, and long-term strategic planning for the overall training and education program. The following are not presented with regard to any particular rank order; they are all important.

### **Course and Instructor Evaluations**

Students complete a formal survey at the end of each level, or step, in the program. The survey uses a forced-choice, Likert scale, as well as open-ended comments. The answers and comments, which are kept confidential, focus on the instructor, curriculum, and self-reporting of enhanced competency. The items on each respective survey are based on the expected outcome competencies that are explicated in materials distributed to students at the start of each instructional unit. These handouts delineate the educational rubric, with heavy emphasis on learning outcomes.

Survey respondents are asked to identify the type of organization in which they are employed. This provides information regarding any number of matters of interest, particularly the applicability of curriculum to various domains of government. This is a public manager's program, applicable to the broad array of government entities.

A clear line of communication extends from participants and teaching faculty to program administrators regarding course content and instruction. This communication ensures timely action with regard to any unanticipated consequences or "crises" that may arise.

### **Evaluation of Learning**

Each level of CPM requires demonstration of learning and competency. Each participant is required to present a "practicum," in which he or she shows the class (group) how a particular element of curriculum applies to his or her respective employment. These are scheduled in a way that all major elements of curriculum are presented, by students, in a practical, thoughtful manner. These practicums drive much group discussion and often illustrate the generic applicability of content across domains of government.

There is an in-class examination for each level of the program. These examinations can be multiple choice, fill in the blank, or brief narrative. Passage of the exam and presentation of a satisfactory practicum at each level are required for entrance into the subsequent level.

Students must complete an additional sixty hours of training—elective, formal, and outside of CPM, in areas relative to supervision and management—and are required to submit documentation of this to the program. This outside training allows students to pursue specific areas of knowledge in which they are interested or pertinent to their field of employment. It also broadens their education, negating any possible adverse consequences of CPM being their only management instruction. Reports delineating these credits are then submitted to the program administrators and provide feedback on areas for possible inclusion in the program. For example, a large number of students electing courses in a specific topic may indicate a demand that the program should address.

Participants are required to submit a final course "project." The framework for this project is explained at the beginning of the CPM experience and periodically reinforced throughout the program. The project focuses on a significant problem or opportunity at work and must be approved by the student's work administrator as well as by the CPM instructor.

The project is designed to demonstrate cumulative, integrative thinking derived from the total CPM curriculum. The student must apply course content at work and use the curriculum as both the framework for, and method concomitant with, action. The project must include significant documentation of, and rationale for, respective action; valid and reliable research strategies; use of scholarly and practice-related literature; and evaluative indicators of success. Instructors "coach" participants throughout the program, often using practicums to build a foundation for this project.

## Group Evaluations

The program advisory board, which meets regularly to discuss program strengths and weaknesses, consists of a representative sample of program graduates, faculty, and program administrators. This group focuses on type of instructional content, order of content, readings, instructional methods, and other emerging issues and concerns. Yearly changes in curriculum, broadly defined, are typical. The board comprises program graduates, organized as the Certified Public Managers Society of New Jersey.

Although the original training and educational focus was on state employees, as increasing numbers of participants representing other jurisdictions of government entered the program, the curriculum was revised. One area where this occurred was in budgeting modules that had to be modified to incorporate local budgeting issues, yet still pertain to state operations. The processes are interrelated since local budgets receive funds from both the state and federal governments, and accounting processes, for the different monies relative to the budget processes, have commonalities as well as differences. This and other changes resulted from evaluations and suggestions from participants.

## Accreditation as Evaluation

As Bates noted, programs in respective states must be accredited. This is a national, peer review process similar in context and application to accreditation protocols for professional schools, as envisioned by the creator of CPM, Dr. Kenneth Henning. The accrediting entity is the Certified Public Managers Consortium, and respective programs are comprehensively monitored every five years.

This external program review involves three persons, each from a different state. The review team consists of one individual with an affiliation with the consortium; one representing the American Academy of Certified Public Managers, the CPM graduates association; and a CPM instructor. One person actually visits the state and thoroughly reviews the program's curriculum, educational materials, program evaluation instruments and methods, and so forth. The two other members of the review team examine documents only. The team then submits a report to the consortium for consideration of reaffirmation of accreditation.

This type of external review is critical for evaluation and monitoring of learning experiences. While respective states have the ability to tailor curriculum to their respective needs, the overall requisite design must be

valid, reliable, and in keeping with state-of-the-art "practice wisdom." The consortium prescribes the core curriculum, setting specific areas of content that all accredited programs must contain, although each program can add specific topics to meet local needs.

## Longitudinal Evaluation of Outcomes

A 1995 survey of graduates who went on to an executive master of public administration (MPA) program indicated 37 percent of them had received promotions they attributed to completing the CPM program. Those who were in this MPA program were selected for participation by high-level government administrators and thus may have been on a fast track, particularly in regard to the state's efforts at a senior executive service. Nevertheless, this long-term assessment reveals that CPM plays a role in the promotion process. Because this program is a professional development tool, we can presume that most participants will be promoted at some point subsequent to completion.

During the life of the program, state departments and county and municipal organizations have participated at varying levels, which are continuously tracked and monitored. Departments and jurisdictions use their training monies to support individuals in this, as well as alternative and competitive, training. If the program did not meet the needs of specific entities, students would not be enrolled and sent elsewhere.

Thousands of students have completed all six levels of training (management), and approximately three times that number have been involved solely in the first three levels (supervision). CPM is the primary (or sole) venue for management training in some organizations; lists of individuals are waiting to start the upper three levels. Thus, customer satisfaction in terms of meeting the needs of respective departments in the state, as well as other jurisdictions within the state, is high.

The program is a partnership between the individual and the agency that sponsors that person. Perhaps the most effective evaluation would be to look at what the agency got from the program, but no formal central repository of this information exists, a shortcoming that needs to be addressed. Typically, organizational outcomes have been reported anecdotally or to governing bodies and the press as initiatives, not attributed to the CPM experience. CPM projects have been implemented in agencies for their problem-solving contributions, as well as their role in improving the effectiveness, efficiency, or responsiveness of services.

One desired outcome is the development of, and motivation for, a lifelong learning focus. Over 20 percent of CPM students continue their formal education by pursuing associate's, bachelor's, or master's degrees. This is not a new phenomenon. In 1995, a graduate paper investigated "The Effectiveness of the Rutgers Executive M.P.A. Program" and found that 87.7 percent of the participants in the MPA program were CPM graduates.

### Market Evaluation

Put simply, for-profit businesses assess their respective success in terms of sales. If people buy something and continue to buy it, it must be a good product or service that is produced, marketed, distributed, and priced correctly in a competitive market. This same type of logic can be used, albeit cautiously and with reservation, with regard to the continued existence and growth (in terms of number of participating students and sponsoring governmental jurisdictions) of the CPM program. Although these are weak statistical indicators of efficacy, common sense argues that CPM is doing something right.

Generally, state administrative entities do not require completion of the CPM program as an official criterion for career advancement. Any such requirement

would adversely affect using enrollments as a valid indicator of success. Public managers voluntarily participate in this program, at times using their own financial resources and personal time.

### Conclusion

The CPM program transcends the respective administrations of elected officials—liberal, moderate, conservative, Democrat, Republican, state, county, municipal, and others. By focusing on management competencies within a public-sector context, rather than on ideologically and politically based instruction, the program continues to succeed. It has institutionalized itself as a normal activity of government.

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