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Project Management Trends in Latin America

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The Project Management Institute (PMI®) Global Congress Latin America (GCLA) 2006 was held in Santiago, Chile, from November 6th to 8th. Through 45 presentations in 3 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese) it was possible to recognize Project Management (PM) tools and techniques commonly applied through all Latin America. Experiences were also personally shared in all the networking opportunities provided by the congress. The Exhibit room offered the opportunity to learn about services and tools available in the region. All these opportunities allowed the author to identify the following trends of actual Project Management in Latin America¹:

- Project Management as a discipline has been introduced in Latin America mainly by multinational companies interested in following world-class practices in projects developed in Latin America. Local industries are actually discovering the possibilities that PM may bring to them.
- Brazil is the Latin American country with more tradition and expertise in Project Management. Mexico also offers interesting experiences. All other Latin American countries are learning about the Project Management discipline and have limited experience on PM practice.
- There is an immense demand for PM courses following PMI's concepts, recognizing them as worldwide valid. However, there is a limited amount of PM instructors available in the region, this limits the amount of available courses and is leading to an increase in virtual courses.
- There is also an increasing interest in becoming a Project Management Professional (PMP), particularly due to the requirements of foreign investors on counting with certified professionals in charge of projects being developed in the region. Local industries are facing the need to count with PMPs in order to achieve international alliances.
- The Certificate in Associate Project Management (CAPM) Certification is not popular yet, there are no available courses to become CAPM certified, although this certification might have a great potential between project team members interested in following a PM career.
- There are some experiences regarding the implementation of PM and also on starting Project Management Offices. There are also some experiences in developing projects following PM methodologies. All of these experiences included certain work to adapt the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) methodologies to local conditions and needs. These practices are not being systematically shared with other PMs in similar conditions.

¹ Since Brazil is the country with more tradition and expertise in PM in the region, its case is very particular and is not included in the following analysis

- There is a frequent resistance at executive's levels and also within organizational cultures to implementing Project Management practices. This resistance is due mainly to lack of knowledge of the advantages PM will bring to an organization; many employees fear PM will increase control on their daily work.
- Companies' strategic management is not actually related to PM information. Portfolio Management is not commonly known in Latin America yet. MBA programs are gradually incorporating PM as one topic to be taught to executives.
- IT industry is actually leading the field of PM in Latin America. Engineering and Construction Industries are showing some limited interest in PM, applying "the most technical" PM concepts: Project Time Management, and Project Cost Management. These industries are not frequently applying other areas of PM yet.
- Government projects have incorporated PM practices just in a few cases, particularly in those with international funding, i.e. from World Bank (WB), Inter American Development Bank (IADB), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). There is an immense potential for PM application in government projects, which will allow giving better use to resources available.
- Although there is a worldwide broad offer of PM products, particularly in the United States of America, just a few of these products are being employed in Latin America. In the author's opinion, this is due to two main reasons: One, most of these resources are available just in English, which limits access to them for most of Latin American population; and second, PM products distributors are not reaching the Latin American market. For instance, the PMI Global Congress North America included 250 vendors of PM products, services and technologies; the GCLA exhibit in Santiago included only six vendors.

As a conclusion, the author considers that PM in Latin America is beginning its path. Most of the companies and professionals are eager to learn about PM, some are already systematically implementing PM. There is a long way to follow in order to reach Project Management Maturity Models in the region. The first step that should be overcome is to generate consciousness about the benefits this discipline offers to industries, and about the need for following worldwide concepts in the development of all projects as a means to be actively part of the global economy.



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