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### The Project Manager Profession at a turning point: PM practitioners must face the main public stakeholders

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Seeing the advancement of social life in my country, I wonder myself how a professional could more easily find his or her way in this turmoil of technology, progress and struggle for a better life.

One can be confused and, approaching the hard rocky road of a career path, misled by one signal arriving from an unverified source. It would be better to use professional networking and qualified sources of information to help find the best answers and to stay on the right track within the professional framework.

As a project manager you always have to be both guarding and proactive within your team and with the project issues and problems, to work them out as soon as they come up. But isn't this true as well with our profession problems, when facing government, academia, industry, and individual leaders (not necessarily in this order) and when we are trying to locate ourselves within these stakeholders' panel?

This article is not about being passive, but rather suggests that we persuade these main four entities into the project management profession. It is about actively influencing all of them, advocating for the profession and giving a strong signal to those behind. I am one of those who brought to the Romania PMI Chapter's attention the concept of marketing the profession when it became clear that these four stakeholder groups in Romania know less than they should about professional project management.

In most countries, the various professions are recognized, and considered eligible for practice, by local Regulatory Bodies, a professional association, the government and other entities. The government has a keen interest in protecting the Laws, rules, norms and regulations with the ultimate goal of better serving the public.

In the construction industry worldwide, engineers and architects render their services as professional practitioners and in some instances they apply personal stamps along with their official signatures onto the papers. Particularly for the construction industry it can be noticed along with a better framing of profession a further refinement of the methods and tools for project management. Having the recent years continuous growing and the market boom in construction business the need for qualified and in some rare instances certified project managers has followed the same pattern to some degree. Apart from Chapter's action toward promoting and selling out PMI's or IPMA's professionals local industry seemed more oriented and acknowledging it's needs for entrusting the projects in the hands of experienced and tested project managers.

Still, the lack of a consistent pool of resources for an industry being on growth led to some peculiar decision. Having a lot of ongoing or upcoming projects while massive recruiting campaigns when no individual reached the minimum level of qualification as project manager then the position title was lessened in importance but the requirements were maintained as those normally required for a qualified Project Manager. It is simply an example of an attempt to circumvent the issue of lack of resources by lowering the bar while the right-matching qualified individual could be found at the arm-length distance.

These simple examples and some other instances have been used before in an attempt to persuade people who share my vision of the need to get into the local market and to make the Romanian stakeholders in the market want to hear more from us than has occurred until now. Isn't it the certified project manager, that individual who apart from the other officially recognized professionals (many of them part of his project team), can be viewed as standing alone as an official professional, not only by PMI or IPMA but also by any of those four stakeholders?

I believe strongly that this is, among others, the key task of every National PM association or PMI Chapter – leveraging the power of the PM profession. This is surely not a simple task and I wonder why it is not tackled project-wise, making a project out of it? Shouldn't we first try to assess the four stakeholders' level of understanding and perception of our interests, then try to turn their displayed interests to match our goals?

Lets' take them one at the time!

- 1.) The Government as the main referee establishes the rules on the playground, the general targets, and streamlines the others on the legal path. What it needs is the assurance that the body of practitioners and professionals fulfills its services quite cleanly and professionally. Sometimes a stream of resources provided from different corners, many of them of uncontrolled curricula and

perhaps of a poor quality, floods the Government that is in charge of labor and education. The consequence is detrimental to those qualified at a higher level to the benefit of those whose education originates from cheaper and closer to the Government's sphere of influence sources. We may find then PM practitioners with a scattered and shallow range of education in project management competing in the market where certified and highly qualified individuals remain obscured and unnoticed. The Government should be prompted therefore to raise the bar to such a level that only equivalent educational curricula either from PMI, IPMA or local trainers are accepted as eligible documents for the profession.

- 2.) Regulatory Bodies are in many countries an extension of Governmental power at a lower local level. They play the very same role as the Government at higher echelons. They exist to endorse the government's power with the same goal of better serving local communities while applying and enforcing the norms, laws, regulations and so on. If for example a certified professional civil engineer is hired within a project team it is required this engineer to own a professional license and the right to endorse and stamp the official documents, drawings, specifications, calculations. This works in a different way when we take as example the project manager, appointed by the Charter to all of stakeholders. Sometimes this front man relies on the Charter only because no other document will come up to restate its power. It is then a necessary action for the PM professional associations to advocate for the official power to be awarded not only by the PMI or IPMA but from the local regulatory bodies as well. They must be legally entrusted not to employ for the projects with the Government any project managers without a fairly recognized certification. What should PMI Chapters do at this point? They should initiate a marketing strategy and action plan targeting both the Government and Regulatory Bodies with the main goal of promoting the project manager profession with credentials confirmed by reputed institutions. In the end we all are selling our skills in a market where "counterfeit" or "pool and questionable quality" individuals and companies manage to grab a good slice. It is in the interest of the PM profession to convince the market and the buyers to get the best products of a certified quality.
- 3.) Professional Association seems to act somehow apart from the overall background content of their status and contemplate passively this potential market. With the risk of being argumentative, it must be stated that we seem to think of associations in the field of project management being visible only with the occasion of Congresses, roundtables, workshops, seminars and other socializing events. This is a good thing but serves as an intrinsic scope of association's existence: maintaining connections with members and community and sometimes, promoting products and solutions for project management developed by local or international companies. There's a lot more to do for the members or for attracting new members, and when we

think of the marketing concept of “need” probably we should see beyond market driven mechanism. Companies should be urged and/or required by the Government and/or Regulatory Bodies to hire professionals who are affiliated with professional associations or possess demonstrable qualifications. Academia is well represented at this level and this is an important facilitating factor towards urging relevant stakeholders to put the project management profession under the spotlight more seriously than until now. Some of the members within the PM Professional Association are local middle and top managers running Companies in need for project managers since the concept “exploded” in certain industries. Companies are now approaching matrix (balanced or strong) organization and are projectizing their activities. Financial institutions granting funds to the local governments want to have the assurance that the budget spent while the projects are implemented ultimately respond to the main goals envisaged. From this perspective there is a strong potential from inside the Professional Association to promote the very qualified services, which could only be rendered by certified project managers. Imagine then the afflux of membership applications or PMP or IPMA in different grades requests for examinations only because the “market” has a specific demand in terms of eligibility.

Probably with some of the tips above in mind, the PMI Romania Chapter might start looking more attentively to the very present theme of the PM profession getting out of the box and targeting wisely the labor market. We cannot expect individuals coming freely to REPs’ and the PMI Chapter and applying for membership or certification without a good reason for that. If no practical and material reasons are presented, such as getting a better paid job when in compliance with the more stringent requirements of being a certified practitioner, then there will be no driven motive to come to PMI or IPMA or elsewhere. The labor market will ask exactly as much as it matches the lowest cheapest criteria selecting the practitioners from the pool of resources better promoted. As is shown so far we are excelling in being visible only inside our exquisite clubs, lacking the pragmatic approach for getting into the market, satisfying stakeholder needs or modifying consumer behavior.

I am a strong supporter of the PMI Romania Chapter’s aggressive attitude toward pressing the stakeholders above. We need to set the benchmark for the PM profession at our demonstrated and provable level, which has been granted by globally recognized entities. If until now everyone played the role completely disconnected from the other’s perspective, the Chapter should get together at the same table with the stakeholders and make them share the vision. In the end the idea is to raise the bar up until the community accepts our more professional level and to lead the way, pulling behind us the entire class of PM practitioners and aspirants who embrace our professional vision.

Depending on how well this is accomplished, the critical mass of certified PM practitioners in every country will grow slower or faster.



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