

REGIONAL REPORT – ROMANIA



Project Management in Romania A Critical Essay & Report on the State of Affairs

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An Unsettling Start for 2007

On the evening of January 18th, somewhere in downtown Bucharest City in mid mild winter, the PMI Romanian chapter announced its monthly session with a major highlight, among other issues on the agenda: Election Day for the new PMI Chapter Board. A stylish and modern hotel conference room had been selected to host this meeting of a group of individuals who are supposed to shape the Romanian project management landscape.

Attendees at the meeting included project management professionals, practitioners, PMPs and PMI fellows, and specialists from the information technology & communications (IT&C) industry, construction field, trainers and candidates. All were gathered together in the same room with one thought in mind: to show the new Project Management era. Unfortunately, for some participants, it seemed to be an opportunity to try to settle some personal matters which have clouded the professional atmosphere in the recent past.

Even though the session started quietly, everybody felt the air charged with a sort of gunpowder that seemed ready to blow the entire building, due to the tensions and frustrations accumulated over the last two years. The meeting began to feel like a fort under siege. Inside were the acting Board members with some supporters, outside were the challengers, nominated candidates with their programs for better representation of Chapter members. The audience also seemed to be divided by these two groups and in between, in the grey no man's land, the PMI members and/or PMPs who were the main targets for the Chapter. These chapter members were where the attention should have been directed more effectively, but it was not.

The author, who joined the PMI Romania Chapter in mid 2006, had been astonished by the lack of actions by the Chapter over the summer when members scarcely heard anything from the PMI chapter, the most authorized source of project management information in Romania. If anyone had wanted to raise any issue, from PDUs' for the PMPs' to article publishing, then probably he would better forget it for at least three months until the chapter resumed its activities.

On that warm winter evening for three hours, and in my capacity of PMI member and international correspondent for the PM World Today eJournal, I went to the session with hopes

for a clear cut between the past and the future. I thought that the evening must divide not only two historical moments but also two ways of thinking and conducting PMI business in Romania.

The result, however, included hours of revenge, shouting and yelling, allegations and threats of lawsuits. It left a bitter taste in the mouth and an embarrassing feeling that some are still experiencing. It was such a shock that a bunch of brilliant men were so ineffective, unable to pull things together in their own interest, or for the individuals who are suppose to join the club in the future.

The meeting also lacked a quorum (only 42 present out of at least 98, half plus one, needed by the law), which invalidated any decision to run for the Board. Therefore the meeting slipped sadly into a combat zone, with personal attacks. New arrivals could not understand a bit of what was going on in the room and some of them rushed to the exit after one hour, unable to understand either the issues or the arguments. The atmosphere became even more inflamed when the draft of the Board Report was presented.

This is how the year began for the project management profession in Romania!

The Real Situation in Romania

What is actually the picture when it comes down to the PM profession in Romania?

Today in Romania, companies are like virgin forests in the field of Project Management. Organizations seek their own path to project management methodology, with Executives often confusing the terms “*contracts*” with “*projects*”, and where the success/failure indicators in the project field are measured against EBITDA number rather than the well known indicators globally recognized by the PMBoK Standard or any other methodology (those normally part of the Earned Value Management). Government Officials and Employers have no clear understanding of what real Project Management concepts should constitute.

Employers and the general public’s perception of project management and project managers are completely and erroneously misunderstood; some consider the Project Manager as the one who sells more for the Companies. Others believe that the Project Manager should concentrate on contract administration or he/she should demonstrate by no mean technical capabilities rather than leadership skills or team leading capabilities.

Very often the executives force the Project Managers to stimulate the Clients to accept Change Orders as a simple fact and from this point on the Employers judge the good Project Managers from the bad ones based on the number of Change Orders and the additional cash to the Company overlooking the main target for any Project Manager: to complete the Project on time, on budget, with a minimum negative risks elements triggered, well within the quality requirements and satisfying the stakeholders.

This equation has three uncertain parameters- 1.) the Government with its entities, 2.) the Employers, which actually buy the skills and competence of good Project Managers, and 3) the PM profession, with the PMI Chapter in the leading role for pulling ahead the rest of the elements for the general satisfaction.

Underlying Problems

What we have now is a disparate image where everyone gets what is best for its interest and nothing for the Project Manager, who is left behind and uncovered no matter how loud he/she yells for help. What is needed is a fair recognition and professional respect over the

other in-house, non skilled and non certified Project Managers. In the end all comes down to the well known demand and supply curve: those fortunate who are standing on the high point of the demand curve and far from the breakeven point, and I am talking about mostly the IT&C Project Managers from multinational companies. They get the better salaries and their PMP certification is recognized within the Companies. More than that, American companies acting in Romania in the field of IT&C and many other national entities require every Project Manager to be certified by PMI (or IPMA) in order to hold a project management position within the respective organization.

Things are significantly different for other industries, where project managers are internally recruited, given a short intensive “kamikaze” training for no more than few weeks, and then thrown to the battle field. Situations are common in which former contract administrators or people of technical formation are promoted as Project Managers, just because the Law and regulations do not prohibit such approach. This is detrimental to those who voluntarily spend years inside the PM profession and passed tough examinations to get globally recognized degrees. On top of this lies the Governmental Educational Providers, in fact several tens, which, for generous fees and tuitions and under the wide shut eyes of the Authorities, “fabricate” the Project Manager based on superficial and insufficiently refined educational programs with curriculum devised by themselves with no relation to recognized PMI or IPMA standards.

This is the place where the PM profession should be visible and is not present at all: to get trained and certified with PMI or IPMA degrees is in vain if the General Public (Government & Employers) does not feel any need for better quality project management. Until the PMI Chapter or other PM professional organization steps in to help, which might later lead the Authorities to unify the professional approach, things will continue to go as today, with no relationship to globally recognized standards, experience or expertise.

Certifications Not Required

Those professionals who joined this industry, and I am specifically referring to the construction and engineering, real estate development, services and infrastructure and less the IT&C branch, have no guarantee that their certification will gain for them a better salary or a better recognition of their effort and study. Aside from the few companies that recognize the need for a Project Manager to be certified, and which successfully create better conditions and environment for professionals to act at higher standards, there is still a long way to go for the Government and other private entities dealing with significant projects and which hire Project Managers from in-house or from the market on a shallow and unclear selection and trial criteria.

There are situations when the employer wants the project manager to be only a very technical person, a “one-man-show”, overlooking the fact that a Project is teamwork and team effort and that the PM is often only the front man who leads the way. Others want the Project Manager to be judged in terms of project success/failure criteria based on the amount of money attracted, apart from the main contract as change orders. In their opinion this should constitute a key performance indicator when appraising the Project Manager’s performance.

What is needed

In this climate of general confusion, the PM profession must step in and clear out the fog clouds that still lie on the PM ground. This has not yet happened. Unfortunately, the PMI Romanian Chapter has been too passive, without enough advertising, advocating or dissemination of PM principles in Romania. In the end how many executives, sponsors or

stakeholders have ever heard about the PMI or professional project management? It is hard to say, but one thing is certain: things cannot go ahead like until now. This feeling was evident in that room on January 18, emanating from those who stood up and spoke. The intensity of arguments, the louder they yelled, the better I understood that frustration has become the key motivation for a change in Romania.

I had the privilege to meet and get to know almost all of the candidates who now run for PMI Board positions in the next mandate. Some of them are from the educational field, respected and reputed specialists who have shaped the discipline and contributed to the dissemination of PMI principles in Romania. I have great respect and gratitude to them and for their activity and I would be happy to give my vote to some of them with no reluctance. There is still one major question in my mind: whether or not the PMI Board should be comprised of practitioners of Project Management or rather people with academic backgrounds and with a better look over the solution of the equation: Government, General Public and Employers?

Who should compose the new PMI Chapter Board?

What is in it for the PMPs and PMI fellows when selecting one or another situation?

A Board of practitioners would guarantee that since they are well within the very problems of the industries. They might better understand the needs for fine-tuning the activities of the Chapter for the benefit of members or non-members. They could prove themselves as the "inside traders" who shape the PM concepts in line with the PMI and PMBoK philosophy and straight from inside the Company they work for. Those Companies could then be viewed as benchmarks by the industry and everyone would want to learn from their success and to set the environmental enterprise factors with regard to them. Unfortunately this has not happened and companies do not use benchmarking as a powerful tool on their path to success.

Everybody seems to disregard the success contributing factors of the other one and tackle the matters in their visionary and unverified way. Envy and jealousy for others' success are stronger than the inclination to look at what made the winner to get the prize. Project Management Workshops and Congresses should showcase best practices so everyone can understand where they are and which way to go. These should be places where the Government, General Public and the Employers meet and this is also the place where the PMI Romanian Chapter could take advantage of its position, in order to make its voice louder. But a Board formed exclusively from practitioners resolves only part of the problem, in some isolated zones throughout industry, and only those represented by the members.

On the other side we might have a Board grouping together people from Universities, training schools in the field of Project Management. This would guarantee a better educational process, advocated for those who want to embrace a PMP or PMI philosophy and to get certified accordingly. It would also create a stronger link between the Government and the General Public on one-side and Project Management issues on the other side. People with academic functions may have a bit more time to deal with the Project Management matters as part of their daily tasks. Interacting with students, trainees, and companies that have a need for PM training for their employees would surely increase the visibility of PMI concepts among the General Public. Thus, this approach might be positive on a larger scale since evidently there is a high demand on training market and the Project Management training courses would be under the spotlights.

A Board of individuals with academic background could also unify, standardize and simplify the methodologies and approaches scattered widely right now, depending on how a certain company wants to tailor the project Management methodology.

Where the PM Profession Can Help

In the end why play with multiple unverified and questionable approaches when the PMI offers the PMBoK standard as a starting point from which to derive the methodologies? Would it not be easier for both the Employers and Project Managers as well? It surely is since for the same industry everyone plays with the same known rules; imagine a typical Client Contractor relationship for a project implementation when the Client has set the certain standards to be followed by any Contractor entering the project. If the methodology is unknown by the contractor organization then the Project Manager should be hired from those familiarized with the proceedings. The Chapter can step in networking and intermeddling those needs for experienced PMPs' who can see thus their certification valorized and recognized. Or the organization could try to train and get certified as much as possible individuals in order to be prepared for the challenge of the new projects requirements.

One thing is certain when it comes down to the Romanian Project Management environment: the market is flooded with plenty of Project Managers who are promoted based on questionable project management, seniority with the companies, or technical criteria rather than project management qualifications. Everywhere you might look into the Companies staff you may see Project Managers for all kind of operations, repetitive and permanent, you may see Project Managers for a small service and maintenance routine operations, or you may see Project Managers in place just because there is contract legally binding and any contract requires a Project Manager for administer the contract.

Where is the PM profession in all this mess?

But things might be simpler than they look. First why not create the need and educate the market? Why not lobby for the profession. It can start first with creating a legal frame and for this we should start with the Government. The PMI Chapter can lobby for the PM profession and for PMI Standards to the congressmen, ministers and governmental entities. How? Get some officials trained and certified, invite iconic figures from the global Project Management community or from PMI to advocate for the profession in Romania and to show what PMI represents and what the PMBoK Standard could do for Romanian industry. Organize conference and formal workshops and make sure that Government officials are there to listen and learn. This approach has been used in other countries and cities. Why not in Romania?

After the message is clearly understood, the PMI Chapter could help draft a legal framework to be developed when locating the Project Manager profession among the occupational lists. Minimum standards of experience, training, and certification can be established for one who wants to play the role of Project Manager.

If the Government is convinced of the necessity to approach with certain professionalism the issue of Project Management, then half is done. The rest of the work can be done by PM professional organizations and leaders who work with the General Public and with Employers to convince them of the necessity to have well trained and certified Project Managers. Training and Certification, whether by PMI or IPMA, should narrow the options that Companies have and should bring a more unified, organized and structured approach when promoting and training project management personnel.

The Power of Supply and Demand

The classical supply -demand curve works here as well. PMI has something to offer in exchange for the buying demand needs from the market. If the demand for the products or services is low, how can we boost up the market conditions for our benefit? By educating the market and creating those needs to make the market comes to the PM profession, by changing the consumer behavior. PMI should try to boost up the PM market, try to alter the Romanian consumer behavior in terms of its perception of what Project Management is and how a good and sound Project Manager should be qualified. And the Government is the starting point: what is legally binding and compulsory is always demanded in the market.

For the next mandate the PMI Romanian Chapter should focus on reinventing the marketing of project management. It should stop advertising inside the Chapter, trying to get more members in the Chapter and getting more PMPs' certified. It rather should go outside on the market for project managers, convincing and influencing the real industry and government stakeholders just like any Project Manager does when running his or her project.

When the market conditions, deriving from legally required minimum standards, are favorable then the PMI Chapter can easily return to the basics: training courses, advocating PMI concepts, PMI publicity.

Until the General Public is convinced and motivated to hire only certified project Managers, struggles by the Chapter will be in vane. Employers will continue to hire and promote the Project Managers according to their old habits. The Government will remain unaware of the need for change. And the PMI Romania Chapter will continue to struggle with internal politics.

2007 will bring change

The battle for a new PMI Chapter Board is now underway in Bucharest. The parties are reassessing their positions until the next meeting will take place. There is still a final problem to be worked off before and for the election: the attendance of audience. Bylaw rules require half plus one of the active members to be present and to vote in order to validate the election results. Yet, there remains the question of how legitimate is a Board elected by, let's say, 25 percent of the members? This question was raised at the January 18 meeting and the immediate action was to mobilize volunteers for convincing absent members to be present next time. With only 41 voters out of 176 it is really hard to believe that the new Board will embrace the general suffrage of the rest. But still this is not the real drama: the lack of audience or quorum is a clear message that the PMI Chapter lacks sanction by its members. PMI members seem to be quitting due to frustration and discontent with the Chapter's performance.

In this circumstance the solution should be to mobilize the voters, the membership in its entirety, for a change. A change the PMI Chapter members deserve for their vocational and occupational interests. The PMI Chapter is the only leverage we have in Romania for moving the rocks which lies on our career path. The question is where to place the lever for a maximum effect. A good chance is now lying ahead: February the 15th the PMI Romanian Chapter is to assemble once again in an attempt to get the New Board elected. A significant mobilization was performed by the volunteering of some of the fellows who were trying to convince the previously absent members to eventually show up for the final run in this election process. For this to happen even personal phone calls were used for peer to peer to make sure next time the quorum will finally validate the poll results. It is still a question of how effective these actions are and the effect will be seen on that night soon.

Hopefully, someone will take the bull by its horns and make a real breakthrough for the sake of the Project Management professional community in Romania.



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