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### PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROFESSION CURRENT ACCRUALS

A Critical Survey into Today's Perception  
of the PM Profession in Romania

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#### **1.) Current status of Project Management discipline in Romania**

Either called Project Manager, Project Coordinator or Team Leader depending on the Companies' organizational structure, it seems that under the general accepted term of Project Manager the list with professions and job descriptions are abundant in requiring professional with skills, experience and expertise in the field. Whether they know well or shallow what the job entails one can easily notice the growing need for these individuals today when the number of projects of every size is constantly growing up.

If few years ago there was a clear misconception or even misunderstanding of what a Project Manager and Project Management are dealing with, totally mistaking the project for a bunch of

written documents, drawings, technical specifications and other documents related to the scope requirements, today this misinterpretation was been eradicated almost from its root.

There were some years ago in the past when the discipline was tightly linked to the Design Engineering and in those days project teams led by a Team Leader were put up at work for drafting the design documents within the engineering phase for a given project rather than having assigned a Project Manager for the entire project life cycle. That happened in the mid 90s' when the economy and social background in its entirety tried to catch up with the years of changing lying ahead. Few people knew at that time what Project Management was and more than that, what it could have done for newly established companies to sustain their business and to ensure the desired trend of development.

The new generation that emerged at the end of the 1990s' from universities and colleges has made the shift in this perception. Some of them went to the western education institutions on their own money or supported by educational funds which paid the tuitions for them. Others followed specific trainings in project management in US and Western Europe and then returned with the head full of ideas attempting to make it work in their homeland. Then, on top of these accruals PMI came in as well as IPMA and both found a less than critical mass of professionals interested to advance in this newly arrived in the country profession.

Although not clearly confirmed it seems that the first project management professional approaches dated back in the mid 90's thanks to the international financing institutions such IBRD and EBRD which entered the large reconstruction programs in association and cost-risk sharing with the government onto the key sectors in economy: infrastructure, education, rural development.

Because public money were disbursed and spent they asked for specific dedicated teams (Project Management Units) to be established within the financed entity. Project Managers as Consultant, foreign or locals were in place at that time for running the project or program.

That was probably the moment when in Romania the project based approach was born in the form of a team torn apart from the rest of the Company, for a period of time and for a specific effort. This is still the preferred method of project implementation required by the financing institutions when public funds are disbursed for keeping the projects on track.

Later the balanced and strong matrix layers were discovered either imported with the foreign companied headquartering in Romania or arranged by the local managers who became familiar with the western companies management system and approach.

The matrix arrangement is today probably the most used type of organizational structure among the privately held companies after demonstrating its viability for project-based organizations in terms of resource use, projects and program fast-tracking approach.

Two fundamental views are currently reflecting the project management environment: the one focused on the needs of small to large private corporate and the other one for the Government sector that loans big amounts of money, with grace periods and for periods spanning up to 20 years.

If for the later the Project Management comes in the same package with the financing flows (Consultants are normally selected prior to project kick-off to run the project along with the Client's Project Implementation Units) for private sector project management discipline is still a foggy issue. Excepting some global players which opened subsidiaries in Central and Eastern Europe the others remain somehow unclear with regard to how to resolve their problems by implementing successfully a project.

## **2.) Industry and General Public relationship with the profession growth**

Some industries are soaring and make good profit these years while others are still suffering from the lack of investment due to the less attractive economical background. This was highly re-emphasized by the Government this week when an official press release made it clear that among the industry stars two sectors are priorities in terms of employment rates and GDP contribution: IT and automotive components and spare.

Apart from these two we may add the construction business with its niches, residential or industrial since in the last years the wave of relocation from west to east made the players to dislocate entire plants piece by piece and transferred them in Romania within new constructed facilities.

From this perspective there is a known fact that PM Job employment ads are abundant for IT, automotive components or construction sectors. If three years ago the Bucharest area captured the entire attention today with a sort of content one can see that the rest of the country in certain location is targeted for investment projects.

There is also a demonstrable fact that IT, telecom and banking are well organized in terms of project management knowledge and consistent approach and every time Chapter is in session the majority of audience originates from these industries. For them PMI and IPMA are well known

acronyms. Many of professionals acting in these industries are certified Project Managers. This came as a result of development streams followed by investment projects implemented in early 2000 which helped the companies to grow. The change of ownership or taking over actions has strengthened the need for a well coordinated method to implement a project and to solve the problems which initiated that project.

That is why, being continuously under pressure, these industries had to adapt or take as is the project management methodologies, they trained the staff and got PM certified. Part of their success is attributable to this turn taken in early 2000 and in PMI Romanian Chapter at least, IT, telecom and banking are represented by more than 80 % of members. Another notable fact is that the project teams are always teamed up by the book consisting of Project Manager, Business Analyst and IT architecture specialists. It is a sign of maturity of project management discipline in these industries. The Project Manager is never left alone “on the battlefield” and relies upon his/her team during the project implementation.

The gap widens when we come down to the service industry (other than IT related), construction or NGOs’. Despite the fact that constructions “exploded” in Romania in the last 5 years and the forecast anticipates upward trends in the short future the companies are still far from keeping and consolidating position on the market. While the projects starts in every part of the country every month, there is less attention to PM methodological approach people being focused on very few aspects like scheduling and contract management on subcontractors side. Sometimes there is only one or two in the team for very large projects and it seems that tasks normally attributable to the Project Manager are taken over by the upper management.

Thus, the Project Manager turns himself into a Site Manager with some shallow insights to the project management and well focused onto the construction issues. When we look at the Project Manager Job description in construction industry we may be misled by the inconsistency between the job name and detailed job description. Alternative designations such as site project manager or construction project manager leaves no shadow of doubt for those who know what a real project manager should do. By doing all these above, the construction companies lessen the important role the Project Manager should play and narrows his vision to the construction issues only.

As a consequence the Construction Project Manager must hold mandatory a civil engineering degree while the project management skills, knowledge and abilities are optional. More than this, it is highly emphasized in many Job ads that the project manager apart from the fact he must hold a professional civil engineering degree, other licenses awarded by the Government such as quality inspector or construction governmental inspector are highly needed while again, the project management qualifications are optional or insignificant.

It is not a proof of immaturity; it is only a sharing of tasks: project execution, monitoring and control are entrusted to the construction site while planning and contract management, claims management, cost management are conducted from the office level by the upper management.

These are two opposite visions about conducting the project management displayed by the companies. While for the “blue chips” in IT, banking, and telecoms, what made them reach the today’s level, the driving force was located inside their business. For the others in construction and infrastructure there is no pressure inside. Their priorities are focused on growing with the market and not to consolidate the business or management for future conditions when the market shrinks.

### **3.) Academia and educational providers’ response: training and education towards PM development**

In Romania project management is not taught in elementary or in secondary schools since it is considered to be a very specialized field, suitable for academic syllabi only. Our research shows that there are many separate project management courses that are offered either at graduate or undergraduate levels. At undergraduate level, project management related courses are affiliated with departments of European integration, engineering, IT, management and economic science, sociology, engineering, IT. They are not organized into a full academic program leading to a degree in project management and have various names in the curriculum: Project Management, Management of Environmental Projects, Management of Structural Funds, Project Financial Management, Risk Management in Projects, and Management by Projects.

At the graduate level, there are approximately 25 masters’ programs in project management throughout the country. There are cases in which not less than 5 masters’ programs in Project Management are organized inside the same university (Academy of Economic Studies – Bucharest). Given the short history and practice of project management in Romania, one can notice a gap between the huge number of master’s programs and the real number of specialists who are able to teach project management at this specialized level. The curricula for project management courses are focused solely on project management concepts and methodologies. Subjects like Program Management or Project Portfolio Management are rather ignored or totally unknown. Organizational design is covered within the general or strategic management courses and is not often associated with project management in the analyzed curricula, whereas process management is often associated with business management.

There is only one MBA program focused on Process and Project Management that is offered in Romania by Executive Academy of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. The rest of the 21 MBA programs offer a general specialization in management, marketing and financial management. 5 of them offer 1-semester Project Management courses,

out of an average of 4-6 semesters. The other 16 integrate in their curricula project management concepts and theories within more general courses such as “Strategic Management” or “Business Management”.

The growing tendency related to the concept of “corporate university”, meaning the strong partnership between universities and corporate training providers in project management education, is notably absent in Romania. Educational programs are not offered in Romania in partnership either with recognized training providers, or with representatives of the field or of the professional associations. Moreover, the strict criteria for acceding to higher education – especially at graduate level (e.g. mandatory PhD) –make it close to impossible to attract specialists into academia, in a context when Romanian academia is already a rather uninviting place for practitioners.

Regarding continuing education, there are several consulting companies and training institutions that offer project management courses. Most of them last 3 to 5 days, but courses organized in modules and tutorials that last for 3-4 months also exist. Most of the companies (more than 80%) are located in Bucharest. All continuing education programs offer basic courses in project management (Project Management essentials), some advanced courses and only a few (3-4) project management certification courses. Very similar to the academic curricula, such courses focus on project management, while subjects such as Program Management, Project Portfolio Management, or Organizational Design are largely ignored.

Research is closely coupled with the education field and some interesting trends can be noticed here, too. A national institution coordinating project management-related research does not exist in Romania, while universities are considered mainly responsible for this type of research. There is no research institute and the existing professional associations, PMI Romania Chapter and IPMA, do not offer research grants.

Among the known research endeavors dedicated to project management, we can mention three projects carried out by the Academy of Economic Studies (Bucharest), “Methodology for Designing and Implementing IT Portfolio Management Applications”, “Management and Administration of Excellence Research Projects”, “Management of Research Projects” and two research projects implemented by the National School for Political Studies and Public Administration (Bucharest), called “An Assessment of Project’ and Project Management’ Terms Usage in Romania” and “The Perceived Social Relevance of Project Management in Romania. Benchmarking Project Management Maturity of Romanian Higher Education against the European System”, respectively.

We are currently aware of two research projects implemented by private companies in Romania (“Success Factors in Project Management” – Ten Step Romania, “Romania as a Project-Oriented

Nation” – Roland Gareis Consulting Bucharest). Interesting and relevant as they may be, these are still disparate efforts, carried out in the absence of a research agenda that should act as a catalyst and as a disciplinary tool.

The lack of a consistent project management research strategy is reflected in the number and relevance of Romanian project management publications. Most of the project management literature in Romania is made up of translations, whereas the already small number books written in the Romanian language do not have a strong research foundation and do not offer case studies taken from the Romanian market. There is no Romanian journal – be it professional or research oriented – dedicated to Project Management or that has Project Management as a title. No formal PhD degree in Project Management is currently awarded in Romania. A few PhD theses having Project Management as a subject are written nevertheless, but not as part of a formal PhD program.

#### **4.) The leading role of PMI Romanian Chapter, REPs’ and IPMA for shaping the PM background**

They are doing right things when judged from inside: training sessions, chapter meetings, project management events and gatherings, forums and conferences. All these are part of their assumed role when entrusted by the Project Management Institute (PMI) or International Project Management Association (IPMA).

But are all these sufficient for mission accomplishment? At a closer look we may notice that advocating for project management takes place from inside among members or potential members while the group may grow by additions from outside public. Questions may arise whether or not they should advertise for the project management profession by means of training courses for certification or much better, to create the need for certified project managers and project management culture by influencing the outside stakeholders.

So far both PMI and IPMA evolved at a local level advocating from inside the benefits of being associated with these elitist groups and both managed to grow the number of members or certified professionals to a certain level only by promoting the project management from inside to the audience who was formed by insiders mainly.

However, the public knows less about PMI or IPMA even though all insiders figure out that more must be done to raise the visibility not only of these two entities but of the profession as well. Even though it is highly valuable to train people in project management techniques or to disseminate the project management culture among people less connected with the issue still, the driven force comes from the public itself.

It is a tremendous field of action lying ahead to make the public acquainted with the benefits of being part of PMI or IPMA or more, get certified. In the end PMI and IPMA since they postulate the excellence in this field should require the national chapters to persistently advocate for professionals to get valuable and recognized credentials and to make a clear separation between other educational entities training programs which provide short term trainings without verifiable curricula.

Education in the project management field is not cheap and in fact shouldn't be cheap since trainings is assured by experienced professionals and using of expensive materials, books, articles, templates.

People are easily lured away by a cheap credential providing the same position in front of public or employers. This is the key issue in the arguments between becoming a certified professional under PMI, IMPA or university's program and the same qualification gained after a week course with an unknown training provider. Chapters should act in conscience having this issue in mind. Once the general public, corporate, employers in general as well as those who render the professional services of certified project manager will understand that only a tested individual could run successfully a multi million dollar project, then we might say that project management in Romania has really reached the next level of maturity.

What PMI Chapter, IPMA branch or academia could do or how they can shape the landscape is a matter of art and commitment to which responsible are called to rally.

It is not a genuine matter in the Reports from Romania that the issue of project management public marketing is brought onto the table: few people with influence know about high quality project management education and certification. Few high level corporate executives are aware of the issue, and Government by means of Department of Labor and Department of Education should have been made acquainted with the difference between short unclassified training courses and high quality educational program developed by universities and colleges or certification courses.

In the lack of any evaluating format of the profession the requirements are scattered among many educational providers which award the fresh graduates with a project management certificate. This is the place where Chapter's attention as well as high education institutions should focus on. The young practitioners must be encouraged to follow the career path by joining either Chapter or IPMA or even a university master program in project management. Highlighting the benefits would surely make trainee to choose for a better higher standard program enrollment.



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