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Project Management Update from Romania

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Exacerbating the Power of Expert for Project Managers on Construction Projects

It is well known that PMI recognizes five powers attributable to the Project Managers: formal, reward, penalty, expert, and referent.

Depending on the maturity of the project implementing organizations, one or more of these powers can be seen at work leveraging the Project Manager's influence on the project team or stakeholders.

The low developed and less mature implementing organizations tend to assign project control and administration regularly to a middle aged individual, with old work tracking history within the firm and with very good technical background. The same attitude was observed with the governmental companies dealing with public funded projects within infrastructure.

It is an old habit deeply rooted in these organizations according to which experienced and very technical and experienced individuals are the best choice for the project administration when the time comes for big and significant highly exposed projects.

In construction and infrastructure, for instance, invariably the project manager assigned on the job must be always a reputed engineer with excellent technical background acquired over decades of practical on-the-job contact.

Many employers or implementing organizations have made steps beyond this rule in that the assigned project manager must be a local professional engineer with the title to stamp the documents as per local and national regulatory body regulations (e.g. civil works inspector recognized by the Government).

Many of these approaches have been seen in the last years and they are still the only attitude for appointing a project manager within companies and firms non-IT&C field.

While the Penalty of Rewards powers are fading away in a time of recession, there remains a struggle between the young project managers having and fighting to get a Chartered Formal power and the old experienced individuals recognized as Experts in the field and reputed professionals. There is no room for cash or non-cash power of rewarding while companies' budget suffered severe cutoffs in the last year; plans for trainings, team buildings or rewarding the major milestones attained by the project team are all history.

It is afterward a thin balance between a young Formal power project manager and senior old work history Expert power.

Many of local companies do not much value young professionals with provable credentials in project management as much as secondary degree after that of engineering. Old experts are always preferred as project managers, even though the experience and training in project management is sometimes questionable.

In many construction projects and construction companies the modern project management techniques and practices are still awaited; PMI or IPMA approaches are still far away; normal tools such as EVM or Scheduling under CPM or Critical Chain Method are still unknown, while the mighty tabular software is the ruling tools when Management wants to understand what the project's health is. There are many situations in which a young project manager with not so many reputable projects or working history but well trained formally in project management is to team up with an experienced old specialist with no understanding of modern project management science.

It was reported and industry shows that always an experienced expert recognized by the group as a good technical specialist is always preferred to a young and well project management trained individual; this is the actual maturity pattern many companies display during this period.

The saying is very often heard "he/she is so experienced and technical professional" in many projects in the construction sector and it is never considered "he/she has been certified in project management." This discourages the individuals from getting on the course of credentialing and encourages spending years of professional life in learning engineering techniques rather than project management basic rules.

Viewed from outside, a project run from only the engineering point of view with no consideration for the project management evolves up until a certain point where it jams due to lack of guidance and administration conferred by the modern recognized project management tools. There are many engineers around a project at one moment in time but very few are truly project managers capable of pulling out the things when all comes to a standstill due to various causes.

Project Management apart from Engineering teaches how to capture the big picture, analyze the project in phases, break the project down for better control of costs and time, steer the entire effort toward final goals and objectives.

A simple Expert power acquired over decades of technical experience cannot prevail onto the demonstrable and sound education even wrapped up as in a Formal power granted to a younger project management professional. The best situation is to get the two co-existing in the same assignment. But many times, and this after interviewing and informal entrainment with some of the branch professionals, the level of elevated language and tools used by the PMI or IPMA cannot be reached and understood by those in project teams or executives responsible for projects.

Selling the modern project management techniques and tools within an organization is not an easy job. People tend to anchor value only to some recognized benchmarks.

PMI is one, maybe the most important and powerful, of the anchor points in today's project management, and if industry would gain perception of this then everything coming from or in relation with could be valued locally better.

The PMBoK Standard provides overall guidance, however lower level methodologies and practices are called to make the translation in a common language articulated for various industries. PMBoK Construction extension was a major breakthrough to adapt a global standard to a family of related industries. It is probably far enough from the point where people understand the value of a benchmark.

For now the Power of Expert still prevails over the Formal Power of a Project Manager assigned for a job; even the project team tends to value more an Expert than a Formal appointed, well educated project manager due to the lack of understanding of language and tools.

The situation within many local companies and organizations implementing projects is similar to those facts described above and it is unlikely the things to change in the short future having the economic disaster knocking on many firms' door.

With an unsafe and unpredictable future, the few projects that are still alive and authorized are given to experts rather than project management trained professionals.

The culture of project management slowed down its evolution back in 2008 when the economy shrank severely after few years of sustained growth. Today only few of industries survive when talking about project management, and construction and infrastructure are not among them. It seems that all have returned back to mid 90s' and all that was written since then has been erased.

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