

## FEATURED INTERVIEW



# The Project Management Profession in Colombia An Interview with German Bernate, President of PMI Bogota Chapter

*Interview by Ana Maria Rodriguez  
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According to Project Management World Today's (PMWT) interest in learning about the development of the Project Management Profession worldwide, I met with Mr. German Bernate, president of the PMI Bogota Chapter. While sharing a wonderful Colombian Coffee, Mr. Bernate explained to me the actual situation of the Project Management profession in Colombia, and shared some of his experiences as President of this chapter. The following is a synthesis of the opinions that Mr. Bernate generously shared with PMWT.

**PMWT** – What is the actual Picture of PMI in Colombia, and particularly in the Bogotá Chapter?

**German Bernate (GB)** – Actually, There are 900 members of PMI in Colombia, 308 of them are members of the Bogotá Chapter. The intention of the chapter is to continue growing, attracting the other 600 Colombian members who are not registered into the chapter and that are mainly interested in receiving material from PMI and not on being part of our activities.



**PMWT** - What is the situation regarding PMI certifications in Colombia?

**GB** - At this moment, there are 117 certified PMPs in the country, and one CAPM. The chapter maintains a strong activity to motivate professionals to become certified. There is a clear interest on PMI certifications since companies give value to it, mainly to the PMP certificate, so it gives additional points at the moment of applying for a job position. However as everybody knows the PMP certificate requires a minimum amount of experiences and an important level of studies, which are not easy to reach. We try to motivate the professionals on becoming certified, showing to them the benefits this could bring.

**PMWT** - Do companies demonstrate an interest on PMI certified professionals?

**GB** - Yes, they are interested. At the Bogotá chapter we notice this interest. We receive information regarding available job positions, and we distribute this information between the members of PMI in the country, no matter if they are members of the chapter or not. It

is frequent to find the PMP certificate as a requirement to access to these positions. We reinforce to companies the idea that a PMP is a highly qualified professional, therefore his/her wage and job conditions should be on top of those who are not certified. We do not post job searches that do not recognize a plus for a PMP. Companies are interested on these professionals; we cannot allow them to require the PMP certificate without adequate compensation. We also try to guide companies to evaluate if they really need professionals with such a level of training because we do not want to find PMPs being underpaid and performing basic tasks out of the profession. We also reinforce this idea between the PMPs, because we want them to give value to their knowledge.

I am very satisfied with the PMP searches that are performed through our chapter; during the last year we have been asked to cooperate in the recruiting of 60 PMPs, an important number. We have even been contacted from Costa Rica during a search for systems engineers with experience on Project Management. This shows us that the capabilities of the Colombian professionals are valued internationally.

**PMWT** – Do professionals and companies in Colombia demonstrate an interest on the CAPM certification?



**GB** - Very little. Those without a college degree do not consider it as an option, basically because it does not compensate the lack of college degree when applying for a job position. Professionals that are just finishing college are interested on becoming certified, but they desire to achieve to the PMP category. They claim to count with enough experience to become certified, but when we

pointed to them that the referred experience is not enough and we suggest them to take the CAPM while acquiring more experience, they prefer to wait for the PMP certificate because companies are interested on PMPs and not in CAPM. Companies do not recognize a difference on a CAPM young person because they know that he/she is still a young professional that requires great support.

**PMWT** – And the new OMP3 certification?

**GB** - Only one person came to the chapter with interest for the OPM3 certificate, and not on participating on the chapter activities. When we advised this person we saw that his experience on Project Management was very basic, and that he was interested in the OMP3 certificate without understanding its purpose. We try to avoid professionals taking certificate tests that are not according to their interests and experience, to avoid frustrations on the results.

**PMWT**- Do PMPs that have been recruited by companies perform Project Management functions?

**GB** - There is a little bit of everything. Companies do not have the Project Management culture, therefore they confuse the role of a PMP. There are even examples of PMOS working as auditing offices, far from the role stated by PMI. We are still learning Project Management, and companies do not invest enough on its development. Most of the experiences in the topic are distant from the PMBOK standards.

**PMWT** – Is any specific industry showing a major interest on Project Management?

**GB** - No. We do find that software companies are following Project Management procedures that come from their main offices, not necessary PMI procedures since

PMBOK is a non-mandatory recommendation. In all industries they take the elements that result attracted to them.

**PMWT** – Which activities to promote the Project Management Profession are actually realized by the PMI Bogota Chapter?

**GB** - We maintain a constant presence on media, publishing informative articles. Also, every two months the chapter organizes lectures about specific topics; topics are chosen according to what members require. We invite a experienced member in the topic to share his/her knowledge. Although these lectures are addressed to PMI members, we do invite university students to them.

**PMWT** – What is the response of students to this opportunity that the PMI chapter offers to them?

**GB** - Generally, they do participate. Some universities in particular foment the interest of their students. We mainly have students from post-graduate programs in Project Management; many of them should assist to the lectures as a requirement of the program. Universities cooperate a lot with us on announcing these events and the chapter activities.

**PMWT** – What type of Project Management courses are actually being offered at Bogotá?

**GB** - Many courses are offered, of all types. There are post-graduate courses, but no Masters or PhD programs; this is taking some time in the country. The PMI Bogotá chapter gets closer to the universities offering PM programs in order to accompany and suggest them to follow the PMI methodology. In general, they adhere reasonably to this methodology, and complement courses on it with complementary topics that allow them to justify a longer duration for courses. The offer is so wide that it is even possible to find in one university Project Management Courses for Telecommunications, for Construction, for Computer Science. The quality of courses is fairly good. Some universities are closer to the PMI Bogota Chapter, letting us be part of the selection of its lecturers. This is the case for the Universidad del Rosario and the Universidad Piloto. It is our intention to attract more universities closer to the chapter. Once we organized a fair for helping universities offer their post-graduates programs in Project Management; we achieved a high level of assistance and this opportunity was greatly valued by universities.

**PMWT** – Do college degree programs include the study of Project Management?

**GB** - No. Without previous job experience it is difficult to learn the concepts, and evaluation would be merely theoretical. No college student could answer about the use of the 9 knowledge areas, and it has no sense to introduce the topic if they are far from applying it on their jobs. Information about the topic should be taught, being evaluated without asking for criteria. This is obtained with practice.

**PMWT** – Are there in-company training in Project Management?

**GB** - Very few companies offer courses in the topic. They prefer to recruit professionals that have already taken courses. This is considered less expensive than offering in-company training. For this reason, professionals are getting more and more interested on taking PM courses since it gives them a broad competitive advantage when looking for a job.

**PMWT** – Let us know about your experience as the president of the PMI Bogota Chapter.

**GB** - I was elected a year ago. Being elected was a great satisfaction, because it was the result of a hard work looking for support for the ideas of those who were interested on being elected. We even developed a strategic plan for the chapter. It is not easy to get cooperation from the members for the chapters activities because it is a job that is performed after working hours, without any pay. This happens in all countries. Some people get in charge of positions in the chapter because it improves their professional image, but they do not intent to participate. So we are very limited on performing activities at the chapter. However, we have achieved interesting things; I am particularly satisfied with the opening of a “virtual office” that receives phone calls with questions about PMI. Through this service we offer personalized answers to those who call, this are typical answers to frequently asked questions. The call is registered and we contact the person again if we have complementary information on the topic.

**PMWT** – Which are the main questions performed on this calls?

**GB** - How much does it cost to become a member of PMI, and what is its objective. And if we have available scholarships for going off-broad, young people are mainly interested on this issue.

**PMWT** – Have you received any response from PMI regarding your proposal of organizing the 2008 Latin America Global Congress in Cartagena?

**GB** - I have not received any answer, which is very frustrating. I have been asked to wait, but I have no idea of whom or when will take the final decision. It is discouraging that we worked hard for presenting the proposal and we have not received any answer. I assume that after all it will depend on the profitability of organizing the congress in Cartagena.

**PMWT** – Are there any companies in Colombia interested in sponsoring the Global Congress?

**GB** - It is hard to take this proposal to companies because there are many needs in Colombia and support is being asked for many social issues (i.e. education, culture), so it is difficult to ask for support for a private cause like the development of the profession. Companies in Colombia do not find that supporting the Global Congress would strength their images, getting closer to PMI is not seen as an issue that increases their status. Companies prefer to support social causes.

**PMWT** – How is the relationship between the PMI Bogota chapter and other PMI chapters of Latin America?

**GB** - The relationship is excellent, mainly with the PMI chapters in Buenos Aires and Costa Rica. We always maintain informal meetings that are very fulfilling. Personally, I am a member of the PMI Madrid chapter, and since a few time ago also of the PMI Arabian Gulf chapter. It is a way of making new friends, it allows me to chat with them and share experiences, I have found that problems with projects are always similar so it is enriching to share experiences. I also keep contact with the PMI Chapters at Malaysia and Singapore, always through informal meetings that are not less gratifying than formal meetings.

I am very interested on the Arabian Gulf idea of creating study groups for taking the PMP test. I am also interested in the idea of organizing groups to analyze lessons learned; gathering together professionals from different industries because at the end each one could take what is useful for its industry. It is hard to document lessons learned of a

project because nobody likes to read about their mistakes. There is few time and energy to document the project when it is finished! So the group work could be more motivational.



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