

A series of short articles on

The Role of Academic Institutions in Educating and Training Project Managers¹

Article 1 of 6

**By Helgi Thor Ingason
and
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The journey - we have come a long way in a short time

Since its introduction in the middle of the 20th century, professional project management has evolved from a narrow field with a technical focus, to the rich and diverse multi-disciplinary field it is now. The rapid diffusion of project management is related to change in modern societies, and increased international competition that calls for new ways of working, with greater emphasis on teamwork and collaboration. Last but not least, the advancement of project management has to do with increased demands for being responsive, for speed and efficiency in meeting the demands of clients and interested parties.

Many see project management solely as a method to prepare and manage the defined and constrained undertakings that we refer to as projects. This understanding is partly true, yet project management entails much more than just what its description might portray. Project management is in fact a general management philosophy, which is currently applied by a rapidly growing number of organisations world-wide. These organisations have, to a large extent, made the fundamental decision to organise their activities to a large extent as projects.

In the business environment, the speed of change has never been greater and it is still growing. New markets bring new expectations that require new products and fresh ideas, which in turn call for new regulations. Businesses must evolve their objectives and process the ever-increasing flow of information at even greater speeds to stay within the game. This dynamic landscape requires networking and a high level of collaboration in order to meet the demands of stakeholders within and outside of any organisation.

The landscape is evolving and this inevitably means organisations must have the ability to manage 'change' fast, sensitively, and efficiently. Recent research conducted by PMI²

¹This series of articles is by Professors Helgi Thor Ingason and Haukur Ingi Jonasson at Reykjavik University in Iceland. Active researchers and educators in the field of project management for many years, they are the authors of *Project Ethics* published by Gower (UK) in 2013. See their author profiles at the end of this article.

² PMI 2012, Pulse of the Profession In-Depth Report: Organisational Agility.

shows that the characteristics of organisations that survive in today's demanding business environment are the ones that are able to adjust well to the ever-changing environment; to change their ways of working, develop new products or services, increase their efficiency and generally meet the demands that they are subjected to by their environment.

When it comes to dealing with change, the project perspective is ideal: you design, plan, execute, deliver and learn from the whole experience. Project-driven organisations that foster a culture that supports continuous improvement have a great advantage in the modern marketplace. They have a defined vision, yet they are flexible enough to adjust rapidly to changed circumstances. Their success is built on employing well educated and well trained workers who are eager to take responsibility for their work. They use best project management practices to do what needs to be done and have the ability to deal with even the most difficult and challenging situations. Managing change effectively requires not only the conventional project management skills that focus on technical measures, but also a long-term view of projects and their products through the dynamic alignment of an organisation's project portfolio and its overall strategy.

This evolution has taken place in a relatively short time and it has had a major impact on the way modern project management is defined, understood and practiced. It has also sparked the need for teaching project management as a higher-level university subject. Modern professional project management has hence become a practical science that aims for innovation, improvement and sustainable results.

Over the last two decades we, as academics who focus specifically on teaching, training and doing research in project management, have noticed how project management, as a discipline, is undergoing a major shift. Project management has evolved from being offered solely in the form of short courses with a rather narrow technical focus within engineering and business schools—typically in the form of CE (continuous education) courses—to becoming a rich academic discipline with a sharp practical focus.

Introductory project management courses are now offered at undergraduate and graduate level within different disciplines and project management skills are increasingly seen as crucial for people pursuing higher education through research projects. The most radical consequence of this is that project management can now be mastered specifically through executive graduate programmes that are designed to simultaneously educate their students and meet the demand of the modern business world.

Through this series of short articles we would like to share our experience and philosophy with the readers of the *PM World Journal*; how we envision project management as a discipline and the role of educational institutions in promoting higher-level professional project management. We view project management education, research and training as the key success factor for business organisations in the future.

In our coming articles we will reflect on our 15 years' experience of developing project management education for different university levels. In our next article we will discuss our experience of offering project management courses as single undergraduate courses. In the third article we will explain the rationale for our successful continuous educational programme—Transparent Project Leadership and Sustainable Project Management. In the fourth article we offer some insight into our tailored interdisciplinary programme for doctoral students. In our fifth article, we will focus on the Master of Project Management (MPM) programme that we developed and are currently running at Reykjavik University in Iceland. This is a higher-level graduate management programme with a sharp focus on developing professionals who get things done. We will reflect, speculate and offer feedback from students that have used their education to pursue careers as management professionals in all sectors of society.

Finally, in our sixth article, we will sum up and draw some general conclusions on our main subject; the role of academic institutions in teaching and training project management.

Down the line we also hope to share with the readers our thoughts on how the field of project management will develop in the future; how educational institutions could react to the needs of society through bringing project management training to a new level; how project management—in the widest sense—could be better aligned with systems thinking and strategy; how insights from aesthetics, ethics and other fields of philosophy could be used to improve project management; and how project management thinking could be used as a pedagogy and in the education of children.

About the Authors



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Helgi Thor Ingason (b. 1965) holds a PhD in process metallurgy from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), MSc in mechanical and industrial engineering from the University of Iceland and a Stanford Advanced Project Management Certification from Stanford University. He is an IPMA Certified Senior Project Manager (B level).

Dr. Ingason is an associate professor at Reykjavik University. He is the head of the MPM - Master of Project Management - program at the university. The research fields of Dr. Ingason range from quality- and project management to system dynamics and renewable energy, production, transport and utilization, changes in the energy infrastructure and energy carriers of the future.

Dr. Ingason has reported on his research at conferences and in several reviewed conference and journal papers. He is the co-author of 6 books in the Icelandic language on project management, strategic planning, product development and quality management. He is also a co-author (with Dr Haukur Ingi Jonasson) of the book *Project Ethics*, published by Gower in January 2013.

Dr. Ingason was interim CEO of Orkuveita Reykjavíkur (Reykjavik Energy) from 2010 to 2011. A co-founder of Nordica Consulting Group, Dr. Ingason is a management consultant and a recognized speaker. In his spare time he plays piano and accordion with Icelandic jazz and world music ensembles. More information on Dr. Ingason can be found on www.academia.edu. Information about the MPM program at the University of Reykjavik can be found at <http://en.ru.is/mpm/why-mpm/>. Dr. Ingason can be contacted at helgithor@ru.is.



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He is also a psychoanalyst in private practice and a management consultant at Nordic Consulting Group ehf. As a consultant, his clients have included energy companies, banks, hospitals, the government and other public and private organizations. Dr. Jonasson is also a mountain climber and a member of the Reykjavik Mountaineering Air Ground Search and Rescue Squad. He is co-author with Helgi Thor Ingason of Project Ethics, published by Gower (UK) in 2013. Dr. Jonasson can be contacted at haukuringi@ru.is