

Women in Project Management: Future perspectives¹

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In 2017 the World Economic Forum published the results of the *2017 Global Gender Gap Report* (1). The report evaluates gender parity across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics in 144 different countries. The economic category evaluates participation in labor force, remuneration and advancement to leadership roles. Notably, after the political gap which is the widest but the one that narrows faster (77% gap that according to the report could be closed within 99 years) the economic gap is second in place (42%) but it would take 217 years to be closed at the pace of today. This means that, globally, women participation in labor force is poor, get paid less than their male counterparts and struggled to get into leadership positions. In other words, many industries are failing to hire, retain and promote women. As a consequence there is a wide talent pool that is being underutilized.

Considering this situation, what can be said about women's role in project management and the future of the profession?

Women in project management are not excluded from what the above results show. Though scarce information is found about women participation in project management, data presented in the *PMI Project Management Salary Survey—10th Edition* indicate that women representation in the field could be estimated to be mainly between 20-30% and that their average salary is lower than that of men (2). This is not surprising, even less taking into account that many of the industries with a long story in project management have been male-dominated like engineering, and construction (3).

Different studies analyze the future of jobs in a context of technological advancement and globalization. Technological drivers (mobile internet, cloud technology, big data, robotics, artificial intelligence, 3D printing, etc) together with demographic and socio economic drivers (changing nature of work, climate change and the emergence of the green revolution, ageing society, urbanization, etc) will disrupt business models and shift the employment landscape to a future where new skills, abilities and knowledge will be needed. Given this scenario, some sectors will face talent shortages and recruitment challenges (1, 4-6).

When we look at the future of project management we found a positive impact of technological changes and globalization. Rapid change and fierce market competition are pushing organizations to rapidly adapt to changes and to maximize value delivery of their businesses and organizational practices. Organizations are increasingly recognizing the benefits of successful management of projects and its contribution to the achievement of their strategic goals. Project management practices are thus growing and expanding to different industries, even to those that were traditionally less

¹ How to cite this article: Quinteros, A. F. (2018). Women in Project Management: Future perspectives; *PM World Journal*, Vol. VII, Issue X – October.

project-oriented like health care, professional services, education and public administration (7-10). Additionally, it is also seen a growth in short term project related work or freelance work, the so called gig economy, where time-limited, project based contracts are chosen over permanent ones. Altogether, this increase in projects and in project based organizations, named by the term projectification by different authors, is expected to generate a project related job growth of 33% collectively by 2027 (7-12) As a result, it is expected that organizations may experience shortages in qualified talent in the future (7). Given that the proportion of women in project management is low, opportunities arise here to fulfill that need and to grow in the area. In fact, some authors agree that one of the different trends of project management in the future is increase women participation (8, 13). It would be interesting to know whether women participation in project management is actually increasing nowadays since it seems to have increased in countries like Germany and UK (8).

On the other hand, looking at the big picture to the whole labor market and analyzing the perspectives for women we found that future jobs will grow mainly in the area of computer, technology, engineering and mathematics. This is worth noting since these jobs belong to highly projectized industries where women are under-represented. This is not only due to low women enrolment in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) careers but also to a low proportion of women entering those fields once graduated and a high proportion leaving them once they have entered (1,4,14-16). According to the *Global Gender Gap Report* (1), if gender gap ratios informed persist over the 2015–2020 period there will be nearly one new STEM job per four jobs lost for men, but only one new STEM job per 20 jobs lost for women.

In summary, future growth and emerging roles in areas with poor participation of women could generate an increase in women economic inequity. Concerns regarding a restricted talent pool have increase among these growing industries who are already experiencing difficulties in their hiring process and that will see them aggravated (1, 10). Opportunities as well as challenges arise. Women and project management professionals with the technical and leadership skills but also with a strategic vision, knowledge and understanding of the evolving technologies and their impact in business models and societies will find opportunities and be in advantage. Industries and organizations may need to put their efforts in hiring, retaining and promoting talented individuals that may not yet be considered or that are under-represented. Governments and society should recognize the importance of education and its impact on gender equity and take actions.

Growing evidence indicate that promoting gender parity has its impact in the growth, competitiveness and future readiness of economies and businesses (1). Projects are the way organizations increasingly use to deliver their results and create value. In view of this, it would be wise for professionals in the project management area to encourage diversity and work towards equal opportunities for women in the field.

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Alnilan Fernanda Quinteros holds a PhD in Sciences (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina) and a graduate degree in Biological Sciences (National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina). After graduating in 2004 she worked in basic research projects in the cellular and molecular field in the School of Pharmacy and Biochemistry of the University of Buenos Aires to finally obtain her PhD in 2009. During that time, she published in peer-review scientific journals of the field. In 2010, she started working in the pharmaceutical industry in R+D+i projects. In 2013 she obtained a PMP certification and started to get involved in project management activities. She is a PMI member and member of the Buenos Aires PMI Chapter. She is interested in biopharmaceutical R+D, innovation and entrepreneurship.