

## **The fight against Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) from the perspectives of projects and of project management**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This seventh Regional Report is the first one that, unfortunately and unavoidably, focuses on fight against Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Italy, from the perspectives of projects and of project management. The Report contains some thoughts by Enrico Mastrofini, the President of [ISIPM](http://www.isipm.it) – the Italian Institute of Project Management –, some ideas about what Public Administrations could and/or should do in terms of increasing the use of project management, by Federico Minelle, Member of ISIPM's Scientific Committee, an overview on ongoing emergency projects, and, finally, some immediate, although absolutely preliminary, lessons learned. It is very hard for me to be, and to remain, neutral in this phase, but I will try to do it in order to share with PMWJ Community some witnesses from Italy, our beautiful country in pain.

## ITALY PROJECT MANAGEMENT ROUNDUP

Both Italian Project Management Community, and, in general, project management issues in Italy, are evidently hardly impacted by COVID-19, but, on other side, project management could become very important and useful, especially for the post-emergency reconstruction phase. I asked to Enrico Mastrofini, the President of ISIPM (Istituto Italiano di Project Management, the Project Management National Association in Italy) to share with us his thoughts about these topics.

*“The present health emergency, together with the drastic measures decided by Italian Government, had a huge impact on both social life and economic activities, and all this certainly concerned our Community too. Today it is impossible to forecast how much time this situation will last and when it will be possible to get back to normal. However, we can be sure that we need, right now, to start designing and planning reconstruction operations, taking into account the changes, both in the ways of working and in people behaviors, which were originated by emergency. Therefore, there is, and there will be, a major need of project management, and of innovation too, in order to use at best those new operational modalities that we have been obliged to experience and/or to implement, on a large-scale basis, on the push of a global health emergency that affects both our lifestyles and our scale of values. Nothing will be the same as before, and the recovery will have to be supported by a program of huge investments, which, also due to the need of relaunching the economy, could become the chance to use extensively a PPM logic.*

*In this period of sharp slowdown, both companies and public administrations will have to decide how to change when life will get back to normal, and also the products and/or services to focus on to sustain a recovery that can combat effectively the present economic slump. Therefore, I believe that, in the coming months, there will be great opportunities for qualified project managers, who will be basic in order to manage the investment projects of the companies, and to support the economic initiatives that public administrations will implement to aid recovery and to recovery the loss of jobs that will concern entire segments.*

*Our country, usually, is studied and is taken as an example because of its capacity of reacting to emergencies, but we do often have a lack in the capacities of preventing and getting prepared in advance. This emergency generated by COVID-19 could also become a big opportunity to plan the recovery, starting from the contents definition of a great action of recovering entire economic sectors; in order to lead this recovery, the availability of both widespread project management skills and a consistent number of very well qualified project managers will be needed.*

*That is also why ISIPM immediately felt that it was necessary and important to reformulate its activities of cultural and professional training that are dedicated to its Members. All social events and in presence seminars that were already planned has been obviously suspended, but the proposal of webinars has been immediately enhanced, including also*

several contributions about the project manager role in organizations that use digital sharing working modalities. Regarding our contribution to digital innovation in terms of services dedicated to ISIPM's Members, we already activated, on an experimental and exceptional base, on-line certification examinations that take place in contexts characterized by a high level of quality and security, and we are studying further educational and explicative initiatives that can be posted online. In all this ISIPM, by the way, succeeded to run all its activities, including the institutional ones, in a smart working modality.”



## **EMERGENCY PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS**

The present situation certainly has a hard specific impact also on Public Administrations, because they have to design and to lead, at the same time, how to face the emergency, and how to address the reconstruction phase. I asked to Federico Minelle, a major expert of Project Management in Public Administrations, an ISIPM's Honorary Member and Member of the Scientific Committee, and a Member of PMWJ's Team, to share with us his point of view about the importance of project management for Public Administrations in present context, and about training and implementing activities that may be needed.

*“In these months, and specifically in these last days, Italian Public Administrations took a series of measures, maybe unpopular but certainly necessary, to face the already full-blown COVID-19 pandemic. Many proposals have already been made – and many others for sure will be made – in order to try to mitigate the health, social, and economic crisis that is already in place, and that is even more strongly prospected. Project management discipline, if decision makers internalize it and operators coherently apply it, may help to face with higher probabilities of success above initiatives, which are mostly actual “projects” or, better yet, “programs” (i.e. a set of correlated projects). Decisions initially are political, but, then, they reverberate on all Public Administrations, and, consequently, on us all.*

Some years after the world financial crisis that was originated in 2007 by the default of Lehman Brothers, a [study](#) that was performed in 2012 by the U.K. Ministry of Treasure

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reported clearly that one of the major causes of the spread of the crisis, in U.K. and in the rest of the world too, was the delay in utilizing project management discipline, also due to the lack of skills in public administrations, although this is the case of a country that may be considered at the forefront...

Indeed, already in 2007, David Pells, the Managing Editor of PMWJ, in his editorial "[Project Management for Emergency Response & Disaster Recovery – A Call to Arms!](#)", had warned with a heartfelt appeal U.S.A. Government about the pressing need of using widely Project Management in order to face the world's emergencies.

In Italy, few years ago, it arose the requirement that each public manager/servant in charge of managing important contracts should have been trained in project management discipline. In addition, [I took the liberty of suggesting](#) that major contracting bodies should have an adequate "PM Maturity" level, possibly in accordance either with ISIPM-Prado® Model, which is part of the second specific national research made by ISIPM in Italy, or with one among the other models that have a worldwide diffusion, and which are all tested and quite coherent each other, since they derive from the very well-known CMMI™ (Capability Maturity Model Integration) that has been developed by SEI of Carnegie Mellon University, presently [CMMI®](#) Institute. In any case, it is important that Public Administrations select the model that they believe it is the most appropriate for them and then implement it coherently, as well as they require to their suppliers to implement it.

Therefore, those specific requirements in terms of project management that are already present in ICT public sector have to be extended also to the construction/facilities sectors, and to the purchase of medical/health equipment; indeed, in ICT public calls for tender of last years, the availability of qualified/certified project managers is considered as a mandatory requirement. In addition, in major ICT public contracts (i.e. hundreds of millions, or some billion Euro, each), specific PMOs (Project Management Offices) are present, in order to help Public Administrations in realizing their projects. Several ICT Departments in major Public Administrations are already well experienced and worked very well too, in some case with the support of external professionals, but several others are just at the beginning of their experience...

Above considerations are valid both in the health/social emergency phase (there are already some Chief Medical Officers who are already expert on these issues), and in the consequent economic reconstruction phase: e.g., in the big work for reconstructing Genova's Bridge, an appropriate Genoese company, very well qualified internationally, which takes care specifically of Project management and of Quality Assurance, is involved!

In fact, the highway bridge "Morandi" collapsed over the city in August 2018, and its reconstruction is foreseen to be completed within summer 2020, through procurement that were assigned to Italian companies. It is notable that architect Renzo Piano, who is

*Genoese too, developed the design of the new bridge, and personally supervises the works from the architectural viewpoint.*

*In order to symbolize Italian will and capability of reconstruction, the initiative “[Bridge of Light in Genoa](#)” lightened new viaduct with the three colors of Italian flag, and it is visible along the entire one kilometer length of the structure, so joining to other initiatives of national pride that were spontaneously born in all Italy during COVID-19 emergency.”*



*“Bridge of Light in Genoa”, courtesy of Salini Impregilo Group*

## **EMERGENCY PROJECTS TO FIGHT COVID-19**

In Italy, Public Health System guarantees free healthcare to everyone, and it is considered one of the best at world, since, for example, its Healthcare Access and Quality Index of 95/100 has been rated, in a [research](#) published in 2018 by The Lancet journal that considered data coming from 195 different countries, at the ninth place on a world basis. Moreover, major part of contagion affected northern regions of Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, Veneto, and Piemonte, which can be considered, on turn, among those having the best health systems in Italy. However, the impact of COVID-19 was terrifying, both for number of people involved, and for tremendous specific pressure on health system. Specifically, serious cases need to be hospitalized in dedicated departments, which include also intensive care, they may need individual breathing apparatus and/or ventilators too, and all that, in the most favorable situations that lead to recoveries, for a period of several weeks; moreover, specific additional spaces are needed also for quarantine, since in not all cases solution of remaining at home is suitable. This caused

a race against time to find specialized structures, personnel, and equipment that could be available just in time before the scary eventuality of local systems collapses.

New dedicated infrastructures have then been built, and existing infrastructures have been adapted, in record time. Initially, a total of 5300 places in intensive care department and of 6.625 places in pneumology and infectious disease departments were available (source: Domenico Arcuri, commissary for the enhancement of hospital structures); these capacities, in few weeks, almost doubled and quintuplicated, respectively (in addition, some tens of patients have been transferred, are hosted and cured in other Italian regions and also in some German hospitals). A brand new hospital dedicated to the cure of COVID-19 is now operational in the pavilions of the Fair of Milan, field hospitals have been installed and made available by Italian Armed Forces and other volunteers (the major one, of Alpini National Association, is located at the Fair of Bergamo), several hospitals in all Italy adapted and/or enhanced their capacity, and several additional facilities, including military structures and hotels, have been made available for less serious patients and for quarantine needs.

A huge number of doctors and other health professionals were, and still are, involved in fighting COVID-19 disease, providing an extraordinary contribution in terms of highest professionalism and total dedication; these categories of professionals, in carrying out their duties, payed also a very hard tribute, since many of them fell sick – and even unfortunately several of them dedicated their own lives – in fighting against COV-19. Special recruitment projects to increase for more than one thousand the number of dedicated health personnel have been carried out, and many health professionals with different specializations have been rapidly specifically trained, as well as many young, military, just retired, and volunteer doctors and other health professionals have been mobilized. In addition, in order to support the northern regions health systems, which were and still are the most affected, China sent – similarly to what they did for some other European countries – some hundreds of doctors and other health professionals already highly specialized in COVID-19, while, within the scope of aid programs specifically dedicated to Italy, Russia sent almost one hundred doctors and Albania about thirty, and, in addition, Cuba and Poland sent about thirty and fifteen doctors, respectively. Moreover, in order to face the emergency, by running and/or by supporting the essential activities, also many other people of different professionalism from diverse organizations, including people from Armed Forces and Police Corps, tens of thousands volunteers, and all the workers involved in essential activities, provided their extraordinary front-line contribution.

Making available, as needed, the specific equipment, both in terms of high-technology ventilators/ breathing apparatus, and of personal protection equipment, as protective masks, gloves and suits, was and is extremely critical, especially due to the high numbers required (in case of disposable personal protection equipment, needs consist of course in millions pieces per day). In the case of personal protection equipment, an additional difficulty was that, being it previously considered “low added value”, all production was, at the time, outsourced by Italy and by other European countries outside EU, mainly in

China. In general, a further hard difficulty is that all countries, due to emergency, need of course the same things at the same time, to such an extent, that World Health Organization said that shortage of personal protection equipment was “the most pressing threat at a global level”. Therefore, special procurements projects have been and are carried out, especially at an International level, and, at National level, actions for both enhancing existing industrial capacities, and industrial restructuring, have been and are made. Among these, for instance, FCA (Fiat Chrysler Automobiles), Ferrari, and Magneti Marelli started to produce breathing apparatus, while quite all fashion houses, including Armani, Calzedonia, Celine, Fendi, Ferragamo, Gucci, Miroglio, Moschino, Prada, Serapian, Scervino, Valentino, and others started to produce personal protection equipment: in general, there are really many companies of all sizes that gave and are giving their industrial and/or economic contribution. In addition, few days ago, there was the very good news that U.S. President Donald Trump, who in the middle of March tweeted “[The United States love Italy!](#)”, announced a major one hundred million dollars aid program dedicated to Italy: “*We’re going to be sending approximately \$100 million worth of, of things, of surgical and medical and hospital things to Italy*”, he said.

The major organizational project that was due to need of trying to limit COVID-19 spread, has been, of course, the lockdown of some areas, and, since almost one month, of the whole country; present lockdown includes all non-essential activities, movements are minimal, maintaining social distances is necessary, and all these measures have to be strictly respected. Italy was the first one in western world to implement these radical measures, because of both previous experiences in China and the recommendations made by World Health Organization (WHO), although several other countries were, at least initially, reluctant and/or skeptical about this hard-impacting type of decision. Today, many countries, with different time delays, decided and/or have been somewhat obliged to follow Italian example, and maybe more than one-third of the global population is on lockdown due to COVID-19. In Italy, present situation is that, for now, lockdown measures have been extended, as they are, until the mid of April.

Definitively, it is nowadays a fact that, despite initial skepticisms and/or underestimations – sometimes, unfortunately, accompanied by very unpleasant declarations and/or international press articles that should have been avoided, and that just because Italy has been the first country in western world to be hardly impacted – almost all countries that are worst suffering due to COVID-19 are, with a delay of about 15 days or more with respect to Italy, carrying on similar and/or very similar emergency projects in order to face analogous difficulties.

## **SOME PRELIMINARY LESSONS LEARNED**

It is a fact that all countries were unprepared to fight this invisible enemy.

For sure program and project management can help in the operational phases, when facing the emergency, and even more in the previous planning phases, i.e. when preventing the emergency itself; therefore, competent people have to be involved, at all levels, and relevant measures and/or actions have to be planned and/or to be put in place coherently.

Rules in peacetime cannot be the same as in wartime (most of existing international agreements do not even include the word “crisis”!), and extreme globalism and *marketism* proved all their weaknesses: new rules, also in terms of cooperation and of solidarity, have to be agreed (e.g., in Italy, a survey of a few days ago reported that more than two thirds of Italians feel that European Union behavior in COVID-19 emergency has been totally inadequate, and this is a big political warning).

Maybe it is time that we all put “people at center” again: in fact, stakeholder-centered values are still and always valid, and can be a primary reference to live both in health and in wealth.

In order to conclude with a message of hope, this is an example of the reaction of thousands of Italian children – fortunately most children seem to be almost immune to COVID-19 worst effects – who have drawn at their houses, and then shown outside, posters with rainbows and the antivirus slogan “#andrà tutto bene” (it will be all right).





## About the Author



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Massimo Pirozzi serves as an International Correspondent in Italy for the *PM World Journal*. He received two 2019 *PM World Journal Editor’s Choice Awards* for his featured paper “*Stakeholders, Who Are They?*”, and for his report from Italy titled “*PM Expo® and PM Maturity Model ISIPM-Prado®*”. He received also the 2018 *PM World Journal Editor’s Choice Award* for his featured paper “*The Stakeholder Management Perspective to Increase the Success Rate of Complex Projects*”.

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