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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**On the subject of the Letter to the Editor by Patrick Weaver about the series title “Enterprise Project Governance: How to Manage Projects Successfully Across the Organization” By Paul Dinsmore & Luiz Rocha**

February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Dear Editor,

“Finis origine pendet”, the end depends upon the beginning. So wisely wrote the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Roman poet and astronomer Marcus Manilius. If you do not get the beginning right the end will be very dark. More than ever, getting off to a good start in project management can make the difference between success and failure.

The Romans as great builders had this “principle” in mind to establish a governance to their projects such as: they had a clear vision of what they wanted to accomplish; assigned responsibilities and accountability were key; failure had great consequences. For this reason bridge builders (called *pontiff*) were the first to cross their constructions with their chariots to demonstrate that their product was safe. The Catholic Church appropriated the word in order to call the Pope the highest of bridge builders (*sumus pontiff*), the one who provides a safe journey between this world and heavens.

The Catholic Church also learned a lot about governance from the Romans. In the Pope Palace, in Avignon, France, the seat of the papacy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there is a great panel demonstrating how was the church governance by that time. Since old times governance was not something proprietary of some sort of twelve Olympians. It was more of a learning process beginning with Olympians (*finis origine pendet*) but also considering the learning from the trenches. It is for no other reason that management scholar Henry Mintzberg has situated company strategies on a continuum: those resulting of deliberate internal decisions to those that emerge as a result of their implementation. This means that there is always a learning top-down-up cycle not only for strategy execution but for governance as well. If the trenches are not part of this learning loop the Olympians will look north and their worshipers south, east and west.

Getting back to the series title, as mentioned along the first three articles of this series, Enterprise Project Governance is under the umbrella of corporate governance. The basic logic is that establishing project governance aligned with corporate governance is key to manage projects successfully. But one may argue that EPG is not governance is management. I would then ask where are the boundaries in this more and more complex

world if considered project scale evolution since world war II. Where are the boundaries between large projects and organizations ?

Just as an example, on March 2011, Crossrail, the largest construction project in Europe, investments around \$20 billion, posted a search ad on The Economist looking for a Chief Executive. But wait. Is he a Chief Executive or a project manager ? Can we say that the governance of this mega-project is only management ? And how about this organization that is simultaneously a company and a project ?

Ram Charan, in his book *What The CEO Wants You to Know*, made a very good point saying that every business is the same inside and that “ there is much you can learn from the street vendor who knows every aspect of his business... the world of a street vendor and a CEO are very similar”. The difference between the street vendor and the CEO resides on the complexity of their organizations but the principles remain the same including how to govern their organizations.

Another thought leader, Gary Hamel, in his book *The Future of Management*, poses the question “ Who is in Control of Your Organization ? “. The answer is that very likely your company is directed, managed and oversighted by brilliant men, dead long time ago, who created the mental models that are still shaping the modern organization. Among many we can also include Mr. Fayol. The problem is that their mental models were created for environments of great stability and few changes. I am not saying that we should discard their ideas but only mentioning that if we only adopt mental models from the beginnings of the 1900s we are going to have a problem.

Returning to the realm of project management, what drove the writing of our book and this series was the observation that there is something beyond procedures, norms, and standards driving the success or failure of projects. It is not only doing projects right. It is not only doing the right projects right. It is essential to insure that the right combination of the right projects are done right. This endeavour requires oversight, alignment, learning and a lot of comprehension about all the human idiosyncrasies involved. Based on the “ finis origine pendet” we humbly chose to start with the topic Enterprise Project Governance.

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