

On the Subject of Project Management needs a Higher Purpose - Part 3 + 4! ¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

7 April 2021

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Dear David,

I just got through the 3rd and 4th parts of your editorial notes on the subject and, of course, I again fully agree with your thoughts and recommendations about social responsibility of the PM profession right now and in the future, in order to support a hopeful good shape of our and only world.

Below I write my comments about your final published parts:

1. It is worthwhile pointing out the classic definition of “civil society” you recall. We must start from this comprehensive definition, because at present neither government bodies nor business enterprises show a real interest in social responsibility issues. Our responsibility, as a professional group of interest on PM discipline, is to widespread the awareness that the PM approach can help in spending efficiently and effectively any effort towards the implementation of all the initiatives according to this mainstream.
2. Doing the “right projects” is the first step! This is the main objective of *portfolio management* implementation in Italy, starting with the already mentioned Recovery Plan. Our actual aim is the long-term benefits: these should be our North Star direction.
3. The projects return on investment (ROI) is a limited and only monetary view of cost/benefit analysis: short or long term benefits must include “*global happiness and well-being trends for all the stakeholders*” (<https://www.happinesscouncil.org/>) or in Italy: Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (<https://asvis.it/>), which I suggest to look at: a site English version is available.

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4. To use the SDGs as a scorecard is good suggestion! Any peculiar example? I will follow it. The above-mentioned ASVIS adopts the 17 SDGs objectives to organize their teams.
5. I totally agree that governance has also to be incorporated into portfolio, program and project management standards and approaches. Italian corporations and governmental institutions have social responsibility legislation, but not yet widely embraced, especially among politicians, as we experienced along many years up-to-now.
6. On the issue of ethics, I just point out that this is one of the pillars of ISIPM members rules of conduct.
7. Keeping projects aligned to strategy is the role of portfolio management office (PMO). But in order to have the whole organization tuned with the many project goals (and to realign them, when it is necessary in present turbulent times, it can be achieved only if the whole organization has an adequate PM “maturity” level, as mentioned in a previous editorial note.
8. In order to increase the awareness on PM discipline and on consequent benefits, a communication campaign and related educational program would be promoted by Corporations and Trade Unions, as by the responsible Ministry for Public Administration. Some initiatives already started in Italy.
9. I agree that PM discipline was historically shortsighted on implementation, therefore are we coming back (maybe with more sophisticated tools) to the evergreen cost/benefit analysis? Yes, of course, if we include all the stakeholder costs and benefits, which have to consider not only monetary values, but also well-being items (<https://www.happinesscouncil.org/>) or see the above mentioned ASVIS (<https://asvis.it/>). Earth sustainability has also to be considered: obviously it is our main stakeholder!
10. Of course, governmental and civil organizations must be directly engaged in addressing the topics covered by the SDGs. Our newly appointed Prime Minister (prof. Mario Draghi, respectfully nicknamed "SuperMario", who said: “whatever it takes” in order to protect Euro currency) when he acted as the Head of European Community Central Bank (BCE), in his inauguration speech to the Italian Parliament recalled explicitly that the public investments to be implemented according to the European Recovery Plan must be in full accordance with sustainability guidelines. An excerpt follows: "**Public investments:** *In terms of infrastructure, it is necessary to invest in the technical, legal and economic preparation of public officials to allow administrations to be able to plan, design and accelerate investments with certainty of times, costs and in full compatibility with the sustainability and growth guidelines indicated in the Program National Recovery and Resilience. Particular attention should be paid to investments in the maintenance of the works and in the protection of the territory, encouraging the use of predictive techniques based on the most recent developments in terms of artificial intelligence and digital technologies. The private sector must be invited to participate in the implementation of public investments by bringing more than finance, expertise, efficiency and*

innovation to accelerate the implementation of projects in compliance with the expected costs".

11. Referring to your final rhetorical questions, we have to consider that the just released standard ISO 21502:2020 (<https://www.iso.org/news/ref2645.html>). clearly states that PM scope must include the pre and post-project phases, in order to evaluate not only project output, but even the forecasted vs. actual project outcomes and stakeholders' benefits, which are far more important than the so-called "iron triangle"!
12. About the tasks you suggest that PM professional associations have to be involved, ISIPM is already at work! For instance:
 - our association added a specific sustainability item in its mission statement. This item is going to be embedded in training and qualification processes;
 - a media campaign already started on this issue, sponsored by distinguished opinion makers.
13. Partnering PM profession with some (or all) of “emergency” organizations is a sound and seminal suggestion! While some PM professionals already work in those organizations (governmental or no-profit ones), a planned initiative towards all of them by PM associations would generate a massive outcome. We need to start moving, thinking about an agile-tailored approach!
14. I fully agree that the PM profession needs a higher purpose: as an ancient latin proverb states: "*primum vivere, deinde philosophari*" (live first, then philosophize). In a short time, all of us will be in that condition.

Good news: prof. Enrico Giovannini (past president of Italian Census Bureau and also former Labour Minister), as soon as he was appointed Minister of the new Italian Government, changed immediately the name of his Ministry from “*Infrastructures and Transports*” to “*Infrastructures and Sustainable Mobility*”, clearly stating the shift of its mission to manage these very important national assets in accordance to the overall objectives of the European Recovery Plan under our responsibility (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Next_Generation_EU).

An additional challenge to PM professionals and sustainability supporters!

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