

## **Project Management Update from Argentina**



***By Adriana Cibelli***

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### **Government Project Management Challenges in a complex context**

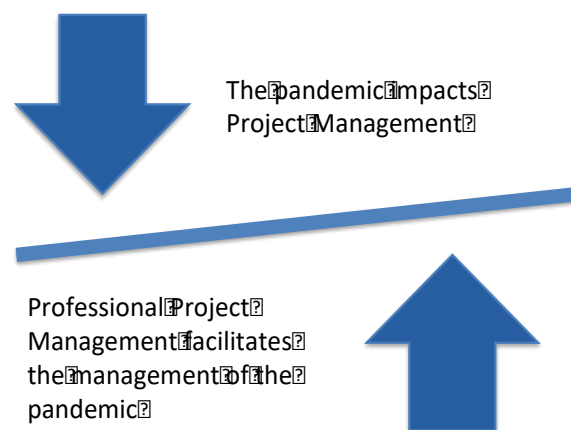
It is sometimes hard to find successful stories within government institutions when it comes to project management, at least, this is what happens in my country; although these types of organizations are the ones that need the most of best management of their portfolios in order to fulfil their commitments to citizens, they do not always understand that the way to achieve this is through professional project management instead of a rudimentary project management approach.

However, I had a happy moment, even in the midst of the social drama of this COVID 19 pandemic that is compromising the health and prosperity of the entire world in a way that we had never experienced in modern times.

This joy is due to the fact that the government of the city where I live, the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, has been implementing a wide range of actions since the first case of COVID 19 appeared in our country, with practices that are proving to be effective enough to respond to this emergency, that is still growing in number of cases and in full development of the pandemic throughout the Argentine Republic.

The context in which these actions were to be deployed was highly complex, with extreme uncertainty, information that changed every minute, where the fight was and still is against an unknown enemy, with no history of how to face it, with a high demand for difficult decision-making, with few and not very credible lessons learned that were rising all around the world. It is in these borderline situations that we truly test the effectiveness of management practices.

Of course, Government Projects were highly impacted. New projects arose to be carried out due to the crisis, others that were in process before the crisis started had to be put on hold, others cancelled and the entire portfolio went through a redefinition process since resources had to be reassigned to respond to the new situation that could not be foreseen, considering also an emerging factor that constitutes an important pressure element such as the strong citizen demand for suitable solutions to the issues posed by the new context.



These new projects were those to attack and control the disease; it was necessary to strengthen the health system due to an insufficient installed capacity, so that it could attend people who required intensive care at the peak of infections.

We were lucky to live far from European countries that were hit by the pandemic before us, since we could benefit from their experiences before the disease arrived in our country. We knew we had to flatten the growth rate of infections to give us the chance of being able to attend the emergency.

For this reason, a quite severe mandatory quarantine was imposed, which together with the rest of the measures adopted, brought the Government to the objective, reducing the infection rate from an initial level of 2 points to one of 1.3, within the time lapse of 45 days.

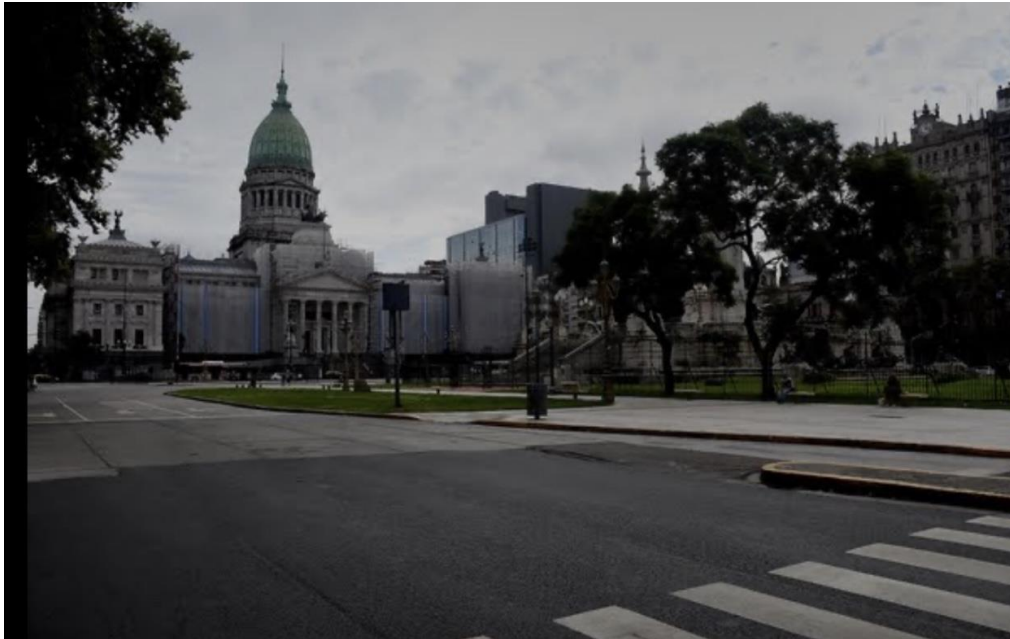
Of course, it is something that even today, more than 100 days after the arrival of the pandemic in our country, actions are still being implemented in order to keep it within optimal values so as not to put the lives of citizens at risk.

All these measures brought the urgent need to reinforce the security system for law enforcement to take care of public safety, without neglecting other city essential services as cleaning and disinfection.

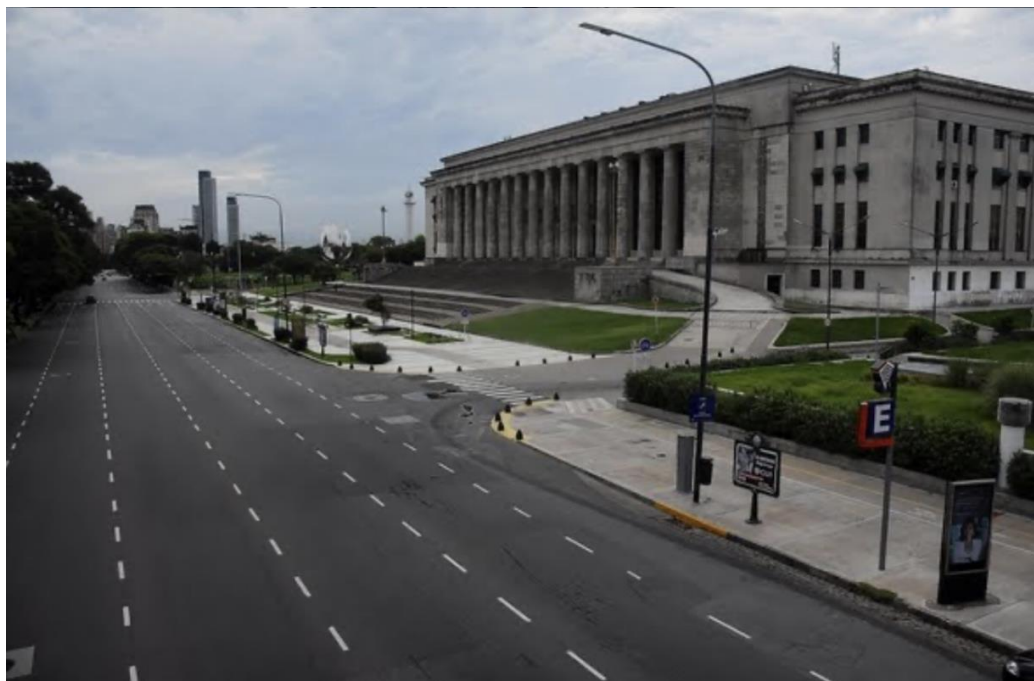
The issues related to education were also critical; the system was not entirely prepared to migrate to virtual classrooms and even more, not all families had Internet access or devices to do so. As if that were not enough, it was still necessary to consider the

situation of people in vulnerable situations, homeless and those who live in neighbourhoods with deficient infrastructure, without neglecting the attention of the elderly that constitute the population of greater risk in this pandemic. Quite a challenge!

Photos of the quarantined city:



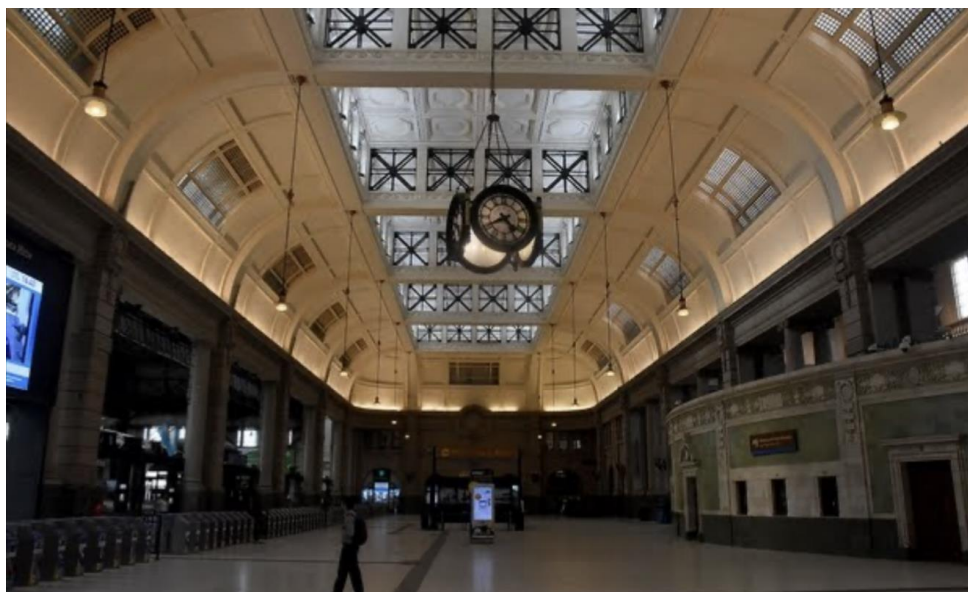
National Congress



Av. Alcorta - Faculty of Law, University of Buenos Aires



Av. Santa Fé - Empty streets of the City



Mitre Railroad – Terminal Station

Let us go back to projects. This crisis also required rethinking the governance of the projects, integration of different republican powers and also integration of different jurisdictions that necessarily had to interact for the effectiveness of the actions that were being implemented.

To achieve this, the PMO was redefined to strategically manage the whole portfolio where speed of execution was critical and so was the information for decision-making at the executive level. This new PMO was called Management Planning and Control Unit.

This redefined PMO has the following functions:

1. Redefine the governance scheme that will govern government management during and after the crisis
2. Portfolio prioritization
3. Development of management indicators
4. Advice to Senior Management
5. Ensure the effective management of communications
6. Coordination of all projects
7. Assistance to project leaders
8. Ensure compliance with the Government's politics for this crisis

Strategic initiatives were prioritized, with quick mechanisms for decision-making, empowering people for greater agility, without neglecting risk management and communications management.

An approach to define lines of action was applied and, for each line of action, work tables were defined, with one leader per table and projects executed within each of them.

All these tables are integrated through a political table, which was in charge of the daily meetings with table leaders and of analysing both global and local panorama, with 5 minutes of time assigned by subject and 10 minutes to receive information from PMO.

A common, strict communications plan was established and reviewed frequently so that it didn't lose effectiveness, also managed through the political table. This communications plan also addressed the need to manage citizen demand, the main stakeholder.

The City Government's budget, quite decimated by the reduction of productive activity, required the implementation of an austerity plan simultaneously. One of the important measures in this regard was the redistribution of human resources from other non-essential areas of government to those to attack the crisis, which allowed significant money savings.

The PMO and the political table directly reported to the Ministry of Health of the City of Buenos Aires, with the collaboration of the Secretary of Innovation and Digital Management.

Every good crisis management plan must contain a plan that can lead out of the crisis and resume normal operations. In Buenos Aires Government it was called "The Day After Plan" and it takes into account the lessons that are still being learned about the virus and the disease that could help normalize citizen life and productive and commercial activity, severely affected by this pandemic.

I have always held that those who are better prepared will be who best manage to adapt to new and challenging situations and will achieve a better performance. In this case I'm reporting, it was unequivocally proven; the great advantage that the City Government had was its mature work methodology, a hybrid methodology with many

agile tools, with a PMO born in the political sphere, which allowed more stabilized actions to give the due responses, to have negotiation and leadership skills, given that it is was an inter-jurisdictional context with leaders waiving different political flags and having different socio-economic realities.

Something very important to highlight was the full support of the Chief of Buenos Aires City Government. We already know that a good sponsor is critical to the results.

I do not lose hope that we all will come out of this crisis with an increased maturity, understanding and capitalizing on the lessons that every crisis always leaves, so that we'll have the opportunity for a more promising future in terms of public project management.

I send you my greetings and in my next report I will be telling you about how a group of young people redefined the mission of their small company to be able to collaborate with relief solutions for the COVID crisis and had a new project running within the term of three days!!

## About the Author



### **Adriana Cibelli**

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**Adriana Cibelli**, PMP is Director of activePMO, a Project Management and Leadership consulting services and training firm in Argentina.

Adriana has a degree in Electronic Engineering from Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, and a post degree in Design of Intelligent Buildings, from the same university and has managed projects for more than 20 years. She is a professor of Project Management and Leadership in some important Universities of Argentina and an International speaker. Adriana holds the Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential, is certified as Scrum Master (CSM) from Scrum Alliance, PMO-CP from PMO Global Alliance, and as SDI Facilitator from Personal Strengths©.

Mrs. Cibelli is member and volunteer of PMI, has been Professional Development VP of the Board of Directors of PMI Buenos Aires and is the former Governance & Policies VP in the same chapter. Elected President in 2019, Adriana will become President of the PMI Buenos Aires Chapter on January 1st, 2021. She is currently working as a coordinator for the C.A.P.A. committee with the goal of integrating efforts and sharing resources between Argentinian PMI Chapters.

Adriana serves as an international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* in Argentina since February 2020. She can be contacted at [adriana@activepmo.com](mailto:adriana@activepmo.com) and [www.activepmo.com](http://www.activepmo.com).