

On the editorial 'This war changes everything...' ¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

20 May 2022

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Dear David

Thank you for addressing the very troubling developments related to the war in Ukraine and the negative side effects. However, I would also like to focus attention on the accompanying positive effects and what we as project management professionals can do in such a scenario. After all, if we "bury our heads in the sand," who else can contribute to the solution? It is us, with the skills to master difficult tasks, who can contribute to the solution!

Every crisis also brings opportunities

After ignoring or taking a long time to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic for an extended period of time, things moved relatively quickly in the case of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops on February 24. And not just with a policy-wrapped message to the aggressor, as, for example, after the occupation of Crimea in 2014, or the brutal war in Syria and other places, but this time with a clear message that this is unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This is all the more remarkable given that the institutions of the United Nations have increasingly acted dysfunctional or obstructed themselves in recent years. The European Union was also exceptionally quick to agree that a joint response was necessary not only to send a strong signal, but also to safeguard the integrity of Europe as a whole. This is being done through solidarity visits to Kiev, humanitarian, financial and military aid, as well as the entry into serious, unprecedented sanctions against the aggressor. As was the case during the pandemic, in which greater use was made of virtual tools for communication and collaboration and, in general, digitization in the working environment received a major boost, this time Europe's energy supply and military defense capability were subjected to scrutiny.

The war in Ukraine also brought into focus the fatal dependency of the continent and of individual European countries on energy supplies from Russia. This includes oil and gas, uranium for nuclear power plants and electricity supplies. In addition to energy saving, faster deployment of renewables and sourcing from other countries, there was immediate discussion about how to move the energy industry more quickly towards sustainability in

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light of the climate crisis. Over the next few years, for example, Germany will be massively boosting the expansion of renewable energies, the energy-efficient upgrading of houses and the transition to vehicles with electric engines or green hydrogen. In Germany, we also have been very surprised when the current coalition of Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens, in the face of Russia's attack, suddenly decided to invest 100 billion euros upgrading the German Armed Forces. In the past, German policy was geared more toward peaceful coexistence in Europe and with Russia and less toward expanding the military. The request of such countries as Sweden and Finland to join NATO as soon as possible in order to protect themselves from a threat from Russia would also have been unthinkable in recent decades. It will be interesting to see what else happens in the coming months in connection with the conflict in the heart of Europe. Perhaps this phase will herald a new period of peace that will bring Europe even closer together. This time with the Ukraine and the neighboring countries, with Russia, Belarus and all those who want to join the idea of Europe.

What professional associations can do in such a situation

In the editorial letter, the professional associations are criticized for doing too little or even being inactive in view of the armed conflict in Ukraine. In particular, the globally positioned associations of IPMA and PMI are addressed here. From my point of view, both have clearly spoken out against the aggression and have assured Ukraine of their support. This situation is of course delicate, as both have members in Russia as well as in Ukraine. It is a tightrope act for the executive bodies working at the associations to communicate a clear message on the matter on the one hand, but at the same time not to offend either side. After all, the project management association SOVNET, which operates in Russia, and the PMI chapter in Moscow cannot be held responsible for the government's military action. If they publicly condemn it, they must fear consequences for themselves, their families, their employees and ultimately also their activities. The difference between IPMA and PMI is that with IPMA all activities are carried out in the respective country and relatively independently of the umbrella organization, whereas with PMI the activities of the chapters are largely governed by the headquarters in the USA, which is why the activities of PMI in Russia - also due to the sanctions - have been suspended until further notice. Project management associations in Ukraine's neighboring countries, such as Poland, have been relatively quick to focus on supporting and helping those who have fled. Poland, for example, soon had to take care of more than 2 million Ukrainians, mostly women, children, and the elderly, who poured into Poland across the border near Lviv, seeking shelter in cities and towns. After being very reluctant to help refugees in 2015, Poland had to bear the biggest burden this year without any provisions.

This is where the organizational skills in transporting the refugees, finding housing for the families and the initial efforts for integration were most evident. Many refugees from Ukraine also came to Germany. The GPM German Project Management Association quickly returned to its refugee project that ran from 2015 to 2017, which produced a master plan and guidance for cities, municipalities, and the states to help refugees in the first months after their arrival and to start integration activities. [For more on that topic: <https://peworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/pmwj116-Apr2022-Wagner-project-management-in-support-of-war-refugees.pdf>]

In addition to providing refugee assistance and coordinating logistical support, project management associations can take care of organizing reconstruction, humanitarian support and other activities in the war-affected country. For example, IPMA already held a first virtual meeting a few weeks ago with the help of the Ukrainian Project Management Association (UPMA) on what activities would be useful for the reconstruction of the country. Even if the project management associations are currently still little known for also directly helping in such crisis situations, they should offer their services and bring their expertise to bear. In this way, they make a tangible contribution to overcoming societal challenges. In this way, relief workers on site can also be trained in project management and later boost their career opportunities with a certificate. These are just a few examples of the practical assistance provided by project management associations and professionals.

Every crisis holds an opportunity. We just have to see it and respond to it, and then we will all develop a little further. In this sense, I am confident that we will be able to overcome the current crisis, because the next ones are already waiting for us. The resilience we have gained today will help us to be better equipped for the future.

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