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## **Project Management Update from Italy<sup>1</sup>**

*End of May 2022*



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### **Italian PM in Wonderland: Risk Management into folk wisdom (a “philosorisk” interview)**

#### **Introduction**

For our second appointment of 2023 from Italy, following the interview I made last year concerning Risk Management I will present a new one softer dissertation in which we consider how Risk Management is “embedded” in our life since the most famous popular saying has been made and spread around the world.

Exploiting for the second time the collaboration of one of the most representative Risk Management Leaders in Leonardo SPA, a company which operates in several market areas in different countries, we will attempt to explore the meaning and backwards thinking of the natural folk saying that have an impact to our actions within the organization we work in.

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<sup>1</sup> How to cite this work: Quagliarini, A. (2023). Italian PM in Wonderland: Risk Management into folk wisdom (a “philosorisk” interview); Project Management Update from Italy, report, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue VII, July.



### **About Leonardo Fiocchetti**

The career Leonardo Fiocchetti has lived up to now is a training path towards his current role. It is not only the outcome of a course of study, but it has been shaped through the acquisition of skills and responsibilities that have evolved in parallel with the technological and organizational progresses of the companies (Datamat<sup>2</sup>, Finmeccanica<sup>3</sup> and Leonardo) in which he worked. "By becoming Chief Technology Officer (CTO) I went from a project leading role to a more strategic-oriented one. The next step as Risk Manager synthesized the set of my experiences over the years, representing the outcome of a path partly personal and partly determined by business changes".

Graduated in Electronic Engineering with IT in Rome in 1991, Fiocchetti began his career as analyst programmer in Datamat, a dynamic enterprise that led him in a few years to take on the role of project manager in the Defense and Space sector. His expertise was consolidated with the participation in 1997 to an Anglo - French - Italian defense project, and the collaboration in France from 1998 to 2001 with Eads LV for the implementation of the ATV spacecraft software control system (Automated Transfer Vehicle), a cargo module intended for transporting utilized by the International Space Station. Back in Italy, he was charged Leader for the software development of the ATV program, and then head of the Modelling, Simulation & Space On Board line, and participated also in following military projects.

In 2005, with the acquisition of Datamat by Finmeccanica, a series of internal transformations conducted Fiocchetti to the role of head of Simulation programs for the Integrated Systems division of Selex, a Finmeccanica's subsidiary. Here he dealt with cyber security projects and in 2013 he assumed the role of CTO in the Cyber Security lab.

Since 2014, Finmeccanica has launched guidelines for the Group's new organizational and operational model with the purpose of aggregating its many subsidiaries in a single large company, a more cohesive and efficient group, with centralized and integrated processes.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datamat>

<sup>3</sup> [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo\\_\(azienda\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_(azienda))

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The transformation process culminated, in 2016, with the operational launch of the new company, renamed Leonardo, in which the organizational structure is split into divisions corresponding to the different business segments.

One of the first innovations was the establishment of the risk management function at the first level in corporate, with Salvatore Lampone<sup>4</sup> as Chief Risk Officer. He was responsible for selecting and growing the professional family of risk management.

In this context, Fiocchetti takes on the role of first level risk manager of the Systems for Security and Information division. At the end of 2019 he becomes CRO of Leonardo International, the structure of all the group's holdings outside the domestic business - represented by Italy, the United Kingdom, Poland and the USA, and in September 2021 takes over the RM function in the Business Unit Elettronica Italia.



Leonardo is one of the world's leading companies in the Aerospace, Defense and Security sectors, and provides global solutions based on cutting-edge technologies, also aimed at the civilian market. Leonardo operates worldwide, through an industrial presence in four national markets (Italy, UK, Poland and USA) and a commercial network in about 40 countries, for a total of 49,500 employees of which more than half in Italy. In 2019 it recorded revenues of €13.7 billion, of which 84% from international markets, and its products, solutions and services are used in more than 150 countries. With €1.5 billion spent on Research and Development in 2019 (11% of revenues), Leonardo is second in Europe and fourth in the world among all companies for investments in R&D.

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**Q1:** Despite knowing all theories and concepts, processes and procedures about Risk Management, It is in our all day long life and when we think to deal with risks, most of the time we approach starting from a popular saying indeed.

**Leonardo Fiocchetti (Fiocchetti):** During the preparation of a Risk Management training, I thought that I could use popular wisdom as a reminder of the obvious usefulness of Risk Management to prevent uncertainties from turning into problems and to improve the outcome of the project. The first sentence that came to my mind was "who leaves the old road for the new one, knows what he leaves but not what he finds". Although at first glance it may seem like a warning to the management of uncertainty, the preponderance for conservation, for the maintenance of the already known is so obvious, that at the second glance I told myself that it would not have produced the incitement I was looking for.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.leonardo.com/it/about/management/lampone>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leonardo.com/en/home>

Risk Management is an aid to the management of uncertainties, which can also suggest avoiding them when the danger is too great compared to the probability of success, but it is not an invitation to stagnation, to avoid at all costs a change. This sentence simply tells us that in the novelties there are uncertainties but leaves to us the choice, there is no incitement for the old or the new way. If we want, it is precisely in thoughtlessness that it leaves to the recipient the invitation to evaluation and consequently to the preparation and management of consequences. To a smart observer this sentence can say a lot, just through what it does not say, but considering it an invitation to the practice of Risk Management seemed to me a very bold leap and so I tried again.



**“who leaves the old road for the new knows what he leaves does not know what he finds”**

**Q2:** It sounds very Interesting. In order to try to rewrite a chapter or a paragraph about Risk Management with more informal style, did you think or find other popular sayings in which Risk Management is hidden?

**Fiocchetti:** For the second one I didn't have to work very hard: "live and learn". Here and there, just three words. How deep can such a simple phrase be, and yet the more I thought about it, the more I grasped its wisdom, a density that when you look at things in haste and over-thinking you can't see. Surely our parents or teachers have told us, maybe to console us in front of a mistake that we have considered serious, but since you are adult how many times have you heard it?

I don't know if you have read the book "Black Box Thinking" by Matthew Syed, where the author comparing the aeronautical world with the healthcare one shows how the first has made the approach "Learning from Mistakes" its own. The reason? Simple: when a plane falls it is very likely that someone will die and that's why that world has chosen to avoid that the same mistake can happen more than once. That is why all aircraft are equipped with the black box on which all the data are recorded continuously so as to ensure the possibility of reviewing what happened in the event of an accident and taking the necessary countermeasures to prevent the same accident can happen again.

Well, even if, I hope, in your context a mistake does not cause loss of life, are we sure that we can afford the luxury of making the same mistake more than once? How much is your professional environment prone to error management as a learning tool and consequently improvement? How often your managers handle the error with you rather than reproach you for the error.

I would like to point out that these three words conceal an individual and collective posture: to learn we must be willing to receive a teaching from mistakes and make it ours.

If we accept the possibility of making mistakes, we should adopt processes and methods that in the meantime reduce errors, but above all allow us to measure/record the result we get and the way we get it. The first measures are needed to verify objectively the correctness of the result, otherwise we could not even know if we made a mistake or not. In short, the admission of fallibility and a positive approach are the first step for continuous improvement. The second measures are needed, as for the black box, to understand what caused the error and draw the necessary consequences in terms of improving the process and its correct implementation. In conclusion, if you are wrong, you will learn if you want to learn.



**“I’ve learned so much from my mistakes that I’m thinking of continuing.”**

**Q3:** Borrowing from juggling a fundamental concept that the juggler must enjoy his mistakes because inside each failure is hidden a sign of progress... we too should change the attitude of frustration into positivity after a mistake to be sure to discover the improvement.

**Fiocchetti:** And perhaps it is no coincidence that another very popular saying says "Wrong is human, persevere is diabolical" or to put it another not too dissimilar "there is no worse deaf than those who do not want to hear".

Too often we find that the perpetuation of the error goes beyond its own evidence. How many times have you heard "we always did so"? And maybe until yesterday it worked, but what worked yesterday is not said that it is still working today.

We make mistakes because we cannot admit that it is a mistake, because we do not want to acknowledge to ourselves that it is a mistake or simply because we have not asked ourselves whether it is a mistake. The bottom line is that all too often the same mistake is made.

How many times have you heard "in order to save money, no expense is spared" or "everything changes for nothing".

How many times, faced with the evidence of something not working instead of looking for the origin of the failure, layers of control are added, almost as if the whole control system were to be further de responsible. The conclusion is that now the same mistake costs even more because of the increase in bureaucracy.

But basically, if we do not "want" to learn from our mistakes, it inevitably follows the perseverance of error.

Let's suppose we are lucky enough to be in a positive environment that makes usage of "learning from mistakes" as an improvement tool. The next step toward a truly evolved context is just a matter of "economies of scale" taking advantage of the experience of others.

One of the English teachers I was lucky enough to know during my professional life used to say "stupid people don't learn from their mistakes, normal ones learn from their mistakes, smart ones learn from the mistakes of others".

So here we could benefit from what we "learned on our own skin" as well as on the skin of others.

If we return to our ideal environment, it is clear that the approach of learning from mistakes must become the heritage of the organization and therefore make systematic use of a process to support learning that records data and allows the subsequent analysis.

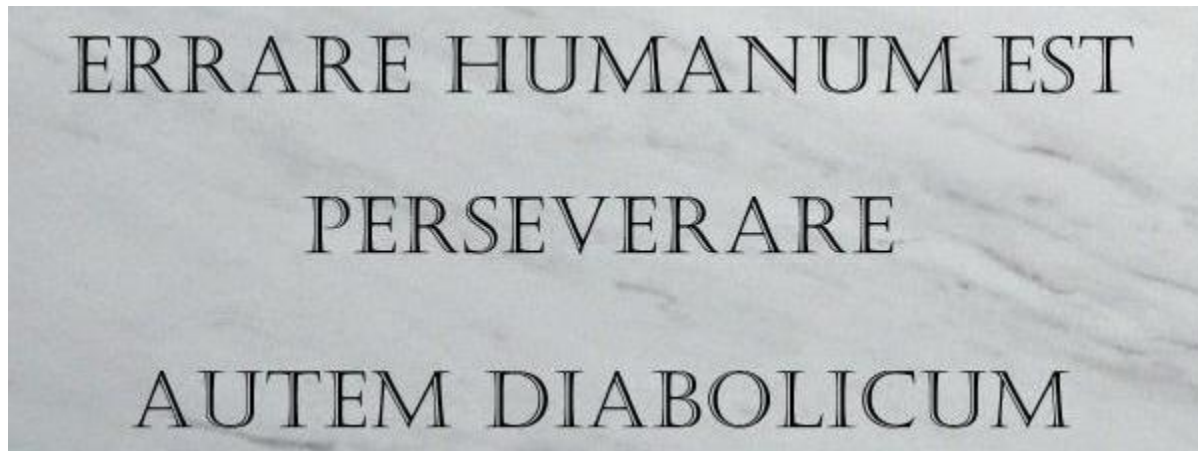
In other words, the Quality Management System cannot pursue the goal of continuous improvement if it does not require the measurement of efficiency and effectiveness of each process and if the methods of analysis and verification of those data with respect to benchmarks are not defined reference.

This simple requirement is difficult to implement once again because of the passing of time and changing contexts. Let's think for example about technological evolution: processes carried out in manual or semi-manual mode that today can be replaced by automatic modes with obvious advantages in terms of error reduction, time reduction etc. Or we think about the inevitable "obsolescence" of professionalism: in the aging process typically machines degrade their performance, People typically degrade their physical and mental performance although for some time they manage to compensate it with the experience and tricks of the trade.

Measuring performance by reference to the previous performance rather than the benchmark performance taking into account the progress of methods, tools and education provided by the College clearly neglects the natural ageing process. So the evolved environment that we

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imagined at the beginning of the reasoning, presupposes a rigorous process of execution and measurement that involves comparison with benchmarks that must be updated based on the evolution of methods, Basic tools and skills of people.



**"Wrong is human, persevere is diabolical."**

**Q4:** So that is willing the real key? In my work experience, I have not met yet an organization which authentically take care about its memory both for mistakes and successes. Usually the real lessons learned lie in the drawers of Project Managers and disappear with their resignations without chance to retrieve and sharing them.

**Fiocchetti:** In fact all this is not enough, our evolved environment requires the generosity of sharing: to put it in other words a Lesson Learning process in fact presupposes the disposition to Lesson Sharing, that is the willingness to share their mistakes with the community in order to draw the resulting lessons for the benefit of the community.

In essence, referring to the wonderful book by Peter Senge "The Fifth Discipline", it would be a form (perhaps still a little involute) of Collective Learning.

Reflecting on this concept while preparing a speech in favor of a meeting of the professional family of Quality, taking advantage of the description of the functioning of our brain, as described in the course Uncommon Sense Teaching by Barbara Oakley, Beth Rogowsky and Dr. Terrence Sejnowski, I tried to make the following "wish":

Imagine if every morning when you wake up, your brain had systematized all the knowledge that all the collectivity had gained during the previous day. Imagine where humanity would be today... this would be wonderful if it happened at least in small communities such as companies or other forms of collective organizations.

At that point taken in the whirlwind of reflections on the three sentences "learning from mistakes", "wrong is human"... "Smart people learn from other people's mistakes", I realized two important things:

- The first, that in reality the popular wisdom does not contain the incitement for Risk Management, but rather a condensed Lesson Learned. Our sayings, our wisdom are nothing more than the collection of experience capable of predicting the final result. So in reality I would not have found the stimulus, the inspiration, the suggestion for a more risk-oriented behavior, a risk-based approach;
- The second is that these three sentences have in common the error. From which arises the spontaneous reflection "is it necessary to make mistakes to learn?". In the first place we could say that it is probably impossible to learn in the absence of mistakes or better to say that given the history of humanity and therefore its (collective) deep and extensive experience, In practice we have already made all the mistakes and therefore in good substance we cannot learn without making mistakes more than anything because the mistakes we have already made.

As I reflect on these concepts, I am reminded of a phrase I heard on the radio many years ago. He said something like "all intelligent thoughts have already been thought, you just have to remember them". I didn't remember the author and so, you go to Google, type "all thoughts..." and there it is, it comes off the screen. But... It's not exactly what I remember. The phrase, no less than Goethe, says "all intelligent thoughts have already been thought, it is only necessary to rethink them". One word, a few letters difference that shifts the center of gravity from inside the base to outside. My version is implicitly optimistic, we just have to remember. Goethe's is, in my opinion, very pessimistic, as far as we may have thought, we will have to think about them anyway. I mean wasted effort. In short, "all intelligent thoughts have already been thought, it is only necessary to rethink them" in its elegance hides the pessimism of man's inability to take possession of intelligent thoughts and systemically insert them into his knowledge base.

But now, motivated by my own goal, I do not give up, certainly there is a phrase that reassures us about the possibility of improving, of evolving, perhaps appropriately managing uncertainties. So I keep trying convinced that you can learn without necessarily having to make mistakes.

Once again, the magic of being in front of something that looks exactly like what you were looking for: "couldn't we learn and innovate from our risks?".

Learning from risk is learning from something that hasn't happened yet but could happen. That's exactly what I was looking for. But the more I look at it, the less confident I am that I've hit it.

It is not a statement but a question and is expressed in negative form. It does not use the indicative but the conditional. In short, it does not express certainty but possibility. He/she is also wondering if we can learn without making mistakes.

But who's the one who questioned myself?

And here, as in psychological films, our protagonist ends up back where he started, having realized that he turned around to get exactly where he started.

The person who asked himself this question is known for his capacity for reflection, for the contribution he made to Philosophy. We're talking about Aristotle.



Perhaps I should feel honored to have asked myself a question he had already asked himself, but the idea that 2300 (about) years later, we are asking the same question leaves me deeply frustrated. Also because, hoping that it is an intelligent thought, I must agree with Goethe.

But before I close, I would like to leave you with a thought that I came across during the research. A thought that I find encouraging, even if difficult to implement. Bertrand Russel said "Education should instill the idea that humanity is one big family with the same goal, and that therefore collaboration is more important than competition!". Perhaps we should spend some time studying what those who have gone before us have learned to avoid continuing to rediscover that basically we "do not learn".

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## Conclusions

Concluding our chat, it was fascinating to talk about popular wisdom and how it is fundamentally rooted in our present with specific reference to the discipline of project management. The hope is to stimulate other discourses not only on the subject of risks but also to explore the other thematic areas of the discipline. Special thanks to Leonardo Fiocchetti for his collaboration and sharing his thoughts.

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## About the Author



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**Alessandro Quagliarini**, MScEng, PMP, MBA, is an experienced Program Manager, with more than 18 years of experience in the ICT sector. He holds a Master's Degree in Telecommunication Engineering from the University of Rome "Tor Vergata" and a doctor's degree in Business Administration from the Bologna University Business School. He got both PMP® and ISIPM-Av® advanced certifications in Project Management, and he is also certified as an Information Management Systems Lead Auditor. He is a Member of the Board of the

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Alessandro is currently engaged in the "Digital Transformation" engineering and industrialization programs of the new Italian "Open Fiber" telecommunications network, with particular focus on the engineering of delivery and assurance processes for the provision of retail, business and industries customers, on the operational management and procurement support for the definition of specifications and contracts, on the definition of operating rules/instructions for maintenance and of requirements for systems development, on the support to the commercial and regulatory lines for the definition of services and processes for customers (Other Licensed Operators and Industries), and on the definition and management of operations compliance with ISO Standards and International Best Practices.

As a Member of the ISIPM Board, he focuses his volunteer activities mainly on the cultural diffusion of the project management to young people – specifically to high school students and also staff, including teachers. As an ISIPM accredited teacher, he has taught project management in public and private institutions, in schools and in universities. He has experience in the organization of events and as a speaker in conferences, and also in proposing and managing EU-funded projects.

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