

The Evaluation of the Project Management Programmes Quality

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The main issue addressed by this paper refers to the quality of training and education on project management – is it different than the perception of quality of training and education in other fields, if so, where, in what aspects, who should be responsible for it, should it only be addressed as input based – provider, trainer, curriculum, or also output based – trainee, etc. A survey was made and the main results are presented.

Keywords: *Quality, Project management training and education*

1 Introduction

Worldwide, project management has become widely known and utilized in almost any activity which could be project-based. Project management isn't about quick fixes - the key to success here, as everywhere else, lies in preparation. Sometimes it's better to throw out the manuals and checklists and start a fresh, focusing on the basics that have stood the test of time. Everyone looks for a quick fix, an easy to-do guide, a no-brainer shortcut to getting the job done. And where does that leave project managers?

A good project manager knows the project management principles, methods and techniques and applies them, always looking for the best outcome of a situation. Some don't even need training to do that, it's in their blood to "get by". Some, on the other hand, need tons of training and never really quite figure out what's the deal about this project management thing.

While training is important for developing a number of competences, the practice makes perfect in all fields, not necessarily in project management alone. However, in project management, every little thing we do, or don't do, has an effect, which cannot always be measured and quantified, if the person is only acting on instinct. Project managers make decisions which affect not only a project, but a carefully built network of contacts and a carefully promoted image. There is also a great responsibility in terms of managing people and connections, communicating, and sometimes manipulating situations

so that the project benefits from their outcomes.

Which leads us to the following questions: Where does the quality of project management education and training lie? How can we define project management training and education quality? Where should we establish boundaries so as to achieve effective and efficient and fit-for-purpose project management training? What should we teach, in order to get a ready-to-go project manager?

2. Approach framework

The main issue addressed by this paper refers to the quality of training and education on project management – is it different than the perception of quality of training and education in other fields, if so, where, in what aspects, who should be responsible for it, should it only be addressed as input based – provider, trainer, curriculum, or also output based – trainee, etc.

3. Quality of education and training on project management – rationale

3.1 Training the Project Manager - The roles of training providers and trainers

A training session could aim at developing or improving one of the project manager competences. By developing, we mean that the competence is at its basics or is not there at all. By improving, we mean that from the documentation received from a candidate, we can assume that some competence exists and we can build on that.

A training session could refer to one of the

topics above, to any number of them combined, or to all of them, thus leading us to a corresponding duration of the training. Although it may seem that we are only approaching technical competences, a balanced percentage of theoretical and practical training, backed up by modern teaching methods, could lead to the improvement of behavioural competences, as well.

We believe that there is a great responsibility that a trainer / training provider in project management undertakes when starting a training session – at the end of that session, there will be a new generation of project managers out there, who either have understood – or not – the basic principles which should conduct their work from then on. We could say that the role of the trainer is to develop and / or build on an existing foundation of knowledge and attitudes and skills, thoroughly assessed before the beginning of the session/s, through a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis and to apply, as much as possible, the theory, so as to achieve understanding and ownership of project management principles.

The trainers should act as coaches and should continue discussing with the trainees, providing a sort of consultancy to the course graduate. People generally go to training because they have a problem and they don't know how to solve it – you will see plenty of training sessions where the trainees ask: "But what do I do about this issue?" The role of training and trainers is not to solve the problem, but to provide you with the information you need to solve it yourself. If they should start solving problems, it's called consultancy and well... it is a totally different story.

People go to training on project management because they eventually start feeling the need to structure and plan better in a world that is moving much faster than 20 years ago. Projects are more profitable, they allow for better use of resources and they provide much more value and technology and know-how exchange. Therefore, training on project management should show its efficiency by providing people who attend the training with the right principles and the right tools,

without "weight-lifting" any unnecessary information.

3.2 The Questionnaire Development

The methodology for the development of the questionnaire was based on the following aims:

1. Development of a questionnaire for assessing the general and specific traits of quality in training on project management
2. A focus on the practical aspects of organization and logistics, as part of the training organization
3. Stress on candidate accession / enrolment in a training course / programme
4. Inputs and resources ensured by the training providers
5. Trainers' profiles
6. Minimum requirements of curriculum
7. The training result

While starting backwards sometimes has advantages, such as establishing ground rules on accession to training and setting up a common language, it is quite disadvantageous to the training provider, as the selection process takes time, human resources and money.

The final aim of the questionnaire is to show whether there is any way to establish a combination of traditional and modern teaching for the project managers-to-be, who do not have the physical time to attend project management traditional courses / programmes, that will be practical enough to offer them a ready-to-go information and that will enable them to provide quality project management to their Clients and that, in the end, will provide them with a certification or a diploma, which is mutually accepted and valuable.

The questionnaire is structured into 2 main parts, split into questions about general aspects of education and training and particular questions related to project management education and training.

Nowadays, project management has reached both in the continuing training area, and in the academic environments. We should identify first whether the training should be structured from the basic training on project management, to more profound and detailed training, as the project management student

gathers knowledge and experience and grows within projects. This way, we correlate the training process with the certification process, which should come after the graduation of an accredited / accepted course. Moreover, we also aim at establishing the homogeneity of the group taking part in training sessions, so as to ensure common language, knowledge and experience and a practice-oriented training, that could turn out to be of better use in day-to-day activity of project management practitioners.

This is why we should also establish, as a result of the above-mentioned analysis, the key requirements for candidates' admission for project management courses, as well as the curriculum for each level and the trainers' competence requirements for each course / group of candidates. These aspects need to be universally accepted and agreed upon, so as to ensure consistency of any project management course, in each country that has a National Association affiliated to the IPMA. This selection should assure quality to the training delivery, as everybody speaks the same language and the information exchange will be more focused, although the disadvantages are quite obvious: a lengthy selection process, of both candidates and trainers and customized project management curriculum. However, if this process also includes information on the candidates' wish to become certified, then the selection process leads to an intermediate result – training admission and to a final result – certified candidate. In this case, a procedure of communication between the Education & Training Board of IPMA and the relevant counterpart dealing with Certification (possibly in each National Association affiliated to the IPMA) should be established.

Bearing these in mind, developing a general project management curriculum, customized for each level of certification, covering achievement of competences from the list above, and applicable to all types of candidates, can be developed and disseminated to the IPMA and affiliated National Associations for final agreement. It will then become the “minimal requirements” for train-

ing providers and trainers, who want to provide education and training services accredited by the IPMA and National Associations and whose graduates can apply for any of the 4 levels of certification provided by the IPMA.

The respondent distribution (figure 1): by nationality - 81 % of the responses came from China. The rest were received in Romania, from a number of professionals of different EU nationalities; **by profession:** The percentage of Project Managers who answered the questions is rather low – 8%. In the “Others” category, we have a software developer and a financial manager. 3 trainers replied the questions, providing insight on the questionnaire shape and content, as well as on project management training quality. The rest are professors, who are involved in both training on PM, but also as team members or team managers in research and other types of projects, thus ensuring a balanced overview of both theory and practical issues

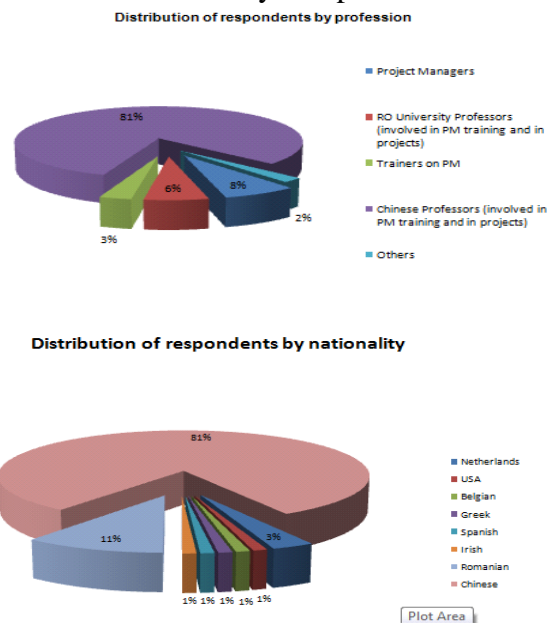


Fig.1.

4. Survey results

The following figures present the main findings.

Location selected for training on PM is considered important by most respondents – 41 out of the 96. Only 11 say that location is very important, same goes for two who can-

not decide. 13 people stated location is not very important, while 27 consider location is neither important, nor un-important.

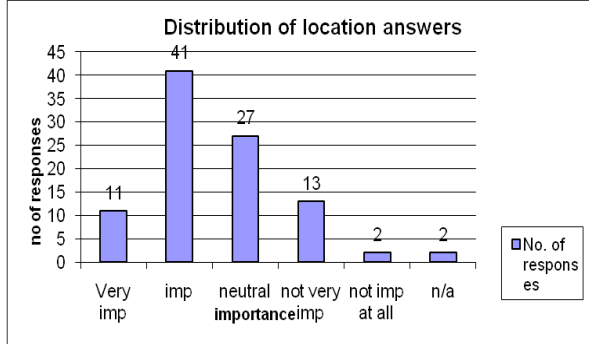


Fig.2.

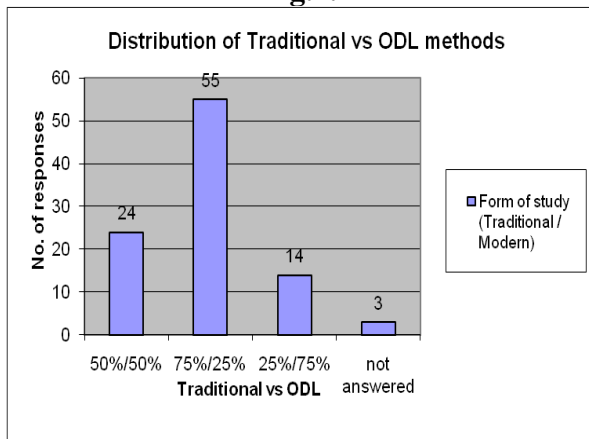


Fig.3.

55 respondents opt for the higher percentage of face-to-face, traditional training. At the extreme, only 14 people consider that modern online teaching is more useful than traditional methods. 24 think an equal split of modern and traditional is useful.

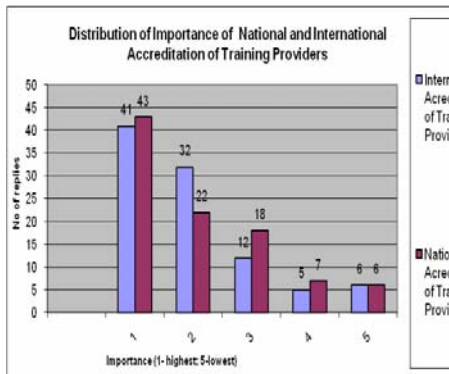


Fig.5.

The majority of respondents opt for the out-most importance of accreditation of training providers (national or international). At the

other end, 6 respondents do not care at all about this issue. National accreditation is seen as very important by 43 respondents, when compared to international – only 41.

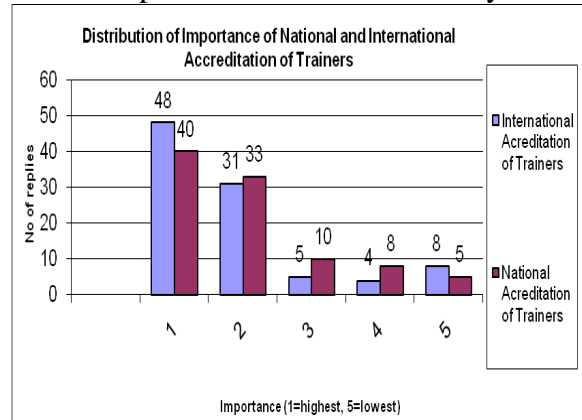


Fig.6.

The same trend as above is kept when talking about trainers' accreditation. The analysis of the questionnaire shows that the importance of accreditation is mostly stressed for the institution, not for the person, but those who opted for 1 in the above questions, also opted for 1 or 2, in the trainers' answers, as well

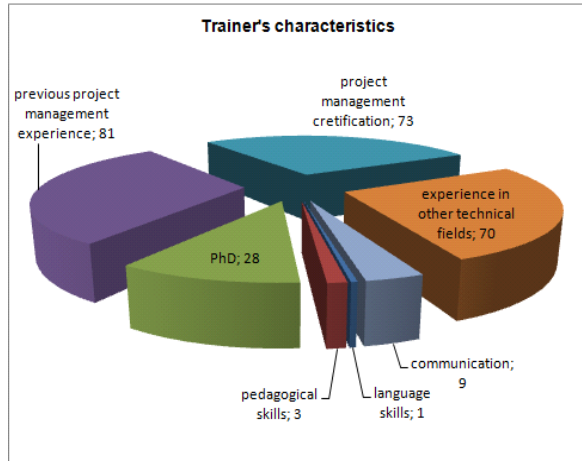


Fig.7.

With regard to the characteristics of trainers, 1 person stated language skills, as being important, while 3 others stated pedagogical skills. 81 state that it is important for trainers to speak from experience, while 70 consider that some technical expertise is also required. 73 say that it would be important that the trainer is certified as Project Manager. PhD is considered important by 28 people. Candidate selection is very important for 18 people, and important for 45. This leads to a

majority of 63 respondents who think that selection of candidates is an aspect of quality assurance. 25 are neutral about this aspect, while 5 feel that candidate selection is not important for training quality.

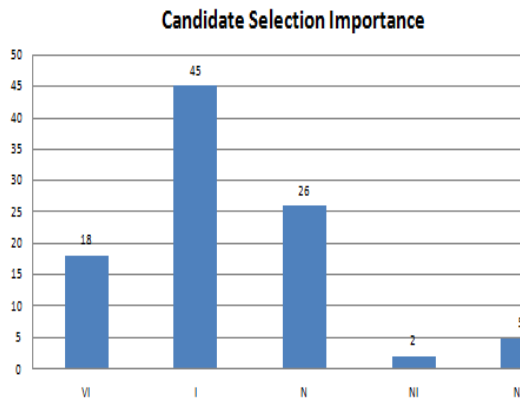


Fig. 8.

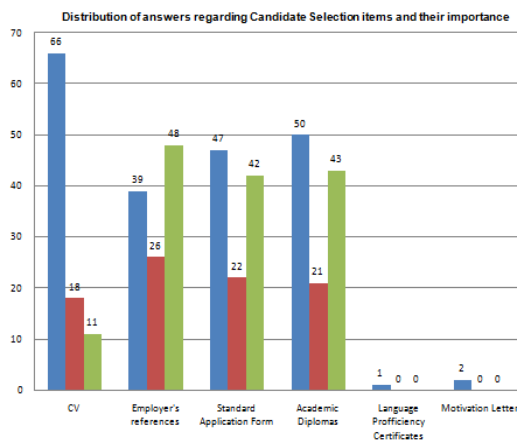


Fig.9.

Most of the respondents declare themselves in favour of candidate selection. Most important documents required in the candidate file are: CV (very important for 66 respondents), Diplomas, Employer's references (very important for 39, but completely unimportant for 48), as well as an Application Form.

5. Conclusions

Quality in project management education and training depends on:

- Organization and logistics – a good organization and combination of teaching methods adds value to training (assessed through Session Feedback Forms)
- The training need addressed – practical solutions, exercises, case studies (assessed through Session Feedback Forms)
- Trainer's skills – pedagogy, languages, knowledge of the field, experience in the field
- Trainee's commitment and motivation

Training providers should promote a coaching service for a limited period after the training sessions. Alumni's databases and forums are desirable solutions. Training providers are not responsible for the performance of the graduate at the work place.

Training impact should be assessed through feedback forms, after a reasonable period from session graduation. Education and training on project management should aim at achieving a profile as close as possible to the one in ICB 3.0.

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